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THE QUEEN'S HOUSE.

A Narrative.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE QUEEN'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS FATHER.

Sunday, the Sunday after the Flower Mission, came, grey and cloudy. Around John Harbuckle's house reigned an absolute quiet, intensified rather than broken by the twittering of the sparrows among the plane trees of Trinity Square Gardens. All was leisure and rest; even the walls of the great Tower of London itself seemed more profoundly still than on other days. But the busy brain and fluttering heart of Alison Bayliss, although they were deeply conscious of the Sabbath around them, were themselves hard at work, full of

excitement, emotion, and a determination, at all hazards, to attend morning service at St. Mary Abchurch. Alison longed to go there alone, if possible; but filial duty compelled her to ask her mother to go with her.

"Mother," she began nervously, when it was nearly time to start, "are you going to St. Mary Abchurch? Because——"

"When do I ever leave St. Olave's? You know how strongly I object to this perpetual gadding about on Sundays!" said Alison's mother, cutting short her daughter's sentence.

Poor Mrs. Bayliss! she would have given anything to have been able to see and hear the father of Basil Penrose, could she have done so invisibly.

"You went to St. Paul's last Sunday, mother," put in Alison, her face again beginning to burn.

"St. Paul's is St. Paul's, and an exception to every rule. It is the cathedral. Going there does not clash with the duty

one owes to one's parish church. You know I make a point of keeping to my parish church."

"Oh, stretch the point now and then, mother! Now, for instance; come with me to Abchurch," laughed Alison uneasily.

"My dear child, do you think I am as mad as you are? Now, can you really suppose that I am going to aid and abet you in running after that—that—er—individual?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, turning her face sharply to her daughter, and looking up at her for one instant, then closing her lips, after she had asked the question, with her own peculiarly dogged action. Curiosity, and a determination not to yield either to her daughter, or herself, were having a fierce tussle in her mind.

"The Rector of Low Kelvingham is sure to be an eminently respectable person. Country rectors always are," said Alison, her own temper beginning to rise.

"They used to be," retorted Mrs. Bayliss.

"In these days, they may be Radicals, or Atheists, or Jesuits, or in fact anything. And I shrewdly suspect that the Reverend Basil Penrose sowed a very pretty crop of wild oats in his youth, a crop that seems to be yielding a truly deplorable harvest. I won't have that young man in this house again! Mark that, Alison!"

"Well, mother, *I* didn't ask him in!" said Alison, her eyes suddenly blazing.

"He's simply turning your brain!" said Mrs. Bayliss.

"There are the bells!" exclaimed Alison, as a musical sound, like the pealing of an organ, reached her ears. "If you won't come with me, mother, I must go alone."

"I don't like your prowling about alone."

"Then come with me! only let us make haste, or we shall be late."

Mrs. Bayliss hesitated; she was simply dying to see what Basil Penrose's father was like; she felt herself so capable of detecting that hidden villainy she knew she should find lurking under his doubtless

correct clericalism. But no, she must not give way, she must not countenance Alison in her wilfulness; and yet—and yet she could not say to her daughter, "I forbid you to go," because, had she done so, she knew that Alison's sense of duty would have compelled her to obey; and then, perhaps, the one and only chance of ever knowing anything about Basil Penrose's people would be thrown away.

Alison moved impatiently towards the door.

"So you've made up your mind to go?" said Mrs. Bayliss.

"Well, yes—that is—" stammered Alison, from the door.

Her mother turned to the window and opened a book, her colourless eyelids and lashes all but closed upon her equally colourless cheeks, with an expression always intensely irritating to any member of her family, who knew it only too well.

Alison felt desperate; but silence gave consent. She took the tacit permission, ran

upstairs, and in a moment forgot everything, except that she was going to Abchurch to hear the father of Basil Penrose preach.

John Harbuckle had started for his own Weigh House Chapel before the altercation began, or doubtless he would have been told off for special duty at Abchurch.

Alison was soon ready. She dressed in a great hurry, dreading all the while a possible recall. But nothing intercepted her flight; she left the house, and ten minutes afterwards she was turning out of a Cannon Street—so broad, quiet, unoccupied, so totally different from the work-a-day Cannon Street, that except for the great station, and the grey dome of St. Paul's at the end of the street, those who knew it best during the week would scarcely have recognized it—into an even quieter Abchurch Yard.

Abchurch Yard is an open space, which seems never quite to have made up its mind whether it wanted to be a square

or a triangle. The yard itself is ornamented with great circles and stars in paving stones; it is bounded by prim, demure houses, which, in the days of John Harbuckle's youth, had been inhabited by professional cuppers, and still retained an air of quasi-medical respectability, especially noticeable on Sundays. On the north of the open space is a brick church, much appreciated by the admirers of Sir Christopher Wren. There is so Dutch a look about this old red brick church, that if one did not know on good authority it had been built in the reign of James the Second, one would imagine that William of Orange and his Hollanders had influenced the architect's taste. As it is, it almost seems as if the coming event, casting its shadow before it, that Dutch shadow had fallen on the exterior of St. Mary Abchurch.

The girls of the parochial schools, in blue serge dresses and prim hats, were crossing the open space to the church.

They gave a touch of living quaintness to the scene.

Alison saw these things with her outward eyes; but she did not linger about them to-day, as she and Uncle John were so fond of doing. She walked straight through the dark lobby, was shown to a seat almost in the centre of the square church, where she kneeled down in the utter stillness, and devoutly asked God to bless that thought of her heart, that design of her mind, which was represented by the two words, "My book." When she said those words to herself, she now meant that book, that novel, she was going to write, which, sweet, silly child! was to give her the means of helping on the great work of Basil Penrose. She sent up her heart's petition in the simplest words. She only said, over and over again, "Bless my book!"

It was to be a novel. Some people, she knew, thought that all novels were wicked; but it never struck Alison that there was

anything incongruous in her asking God to bless it; although in so doing, she felt she was most solemnly pledging herself not to put anything into her book which she could wish hidden from His pure eyes. This, however, was all of a piece with her whole life; she never wished to hide anything from God, but always to live in the light of His countenance.

She looked up presently, when the first deep notes of the organ trembled through the church, and her eyes, as, still kneeling, she raised them to the light, rested upon a little stone woman, outstretching her hand with an upward movement—a little stone woman, standing on the top of a pyramidal monument against a window. Somehow she was a cheering little friend to Alison, who, just then, was in the state of mind when dumb objects speak, and everything seen or heard has its own particular message to the over-sensitive heart.

Alison turned her head upwards to that domed roof of which she had read in

several of Uncle John's books. It was her first visit to the church, but she knew its history and peculiarities quite well. Overarching her was what Sir James Thornhill had intended for a glorious golden heaven, though dim enough on that cloudy Sunday morning; but here and there she made out an angel or two, with shadowing wings outspread, above the wide circle of dark smudge and cross-lights. There was a shelter that could be felt in the little dome, so small in comparison to that vast space at St. Paul's, in which Alison had worshipped last Sunday, and where the sense of a protecting roof is almost lost.

But the low symphony brightened into a triumphant march. Alison knew the clergy and choir were at hand. She became intensely curious and impatient to see Basil Penrose's father.

A moment later, the beadle with his mace had entered the church, followed by a white-robed procession. There were two clergymen; they passed close by her: they

were both elderly men; she watched them eagerly as they went leisurely up the centre aisle to their places, and then buried their faces in their white sleeves. Which was "the Rev.?" Basil's half-playful, half-sardonic title for his father recurred to her, but she could not tell which was he; so the likeness between him and his son could not have been striking. However, one of the clergymen began the service; so she was certain the other was the Suffolk rector.

Perhaps Mr. Penrose would read; perhaps she would not have to wait all the while to the sermon before she heard his voice. He did read; he stepped out presently from the choir stalls to the carved eagle. The lectern was near her; she saw the reader well. They did everything in a leisurely way there. This stranger was no contrast to the whole service. He found his place as if Time had no existence, Alison listening nervously for his first words, the while. At last he began. The

lesson was a fervid passage in Isaiah, blazing like an oriental noontide. The Reverend Basil Penrose rendered it in a singularly faultless English intonation, clear, cold, and decorous, recalling not the impassioned Eastern prophet, but an old-fashioned University tone, long gone out of date, yet not without a certain charm of its own. And yet through it all there was the family voice; the subtle something that told Alison the reader was, indeed, Basil Penrose's father.

He was only just above the middle height; neither stout nor thin; not striking to the ordinary observer in any particular. He had a good deal of grey hair, rather much of a grey beard, a fresh-coloured, well-preserved face, telling of constant exercise in the open country, and, at first sight, and while he was reading, a look as if life, on the whole, had been a tolerably easy affair for him. He was most distinctly, and above everything else, an English clergyman; strictly clerical, not at all

priestly, a clergyman after the High and Dry pattern which still lingers on in out-of-the-way places of the ecclesiastical cliffs, untouched by the strongest Ritualistic, Evangelistic, or Humanitarian spring-tides. An English country clergyman was the Reverend Basil Penrose, suggesting neither Rome, Geneva, nor Berlin, but good sound Canterbury, on a basis of Oxford, as it was before Tract Ninety was written, but with a slight overgrowth of Suffolk.

"The eagle on the lectern is more like Basil Penrose than he!" thought Alison, as the reader mildly finished the impassioned outpourings of the Eastern seer, that, carefully as he suppressed them, still beat with a strong pathetic love, and a fierce life that he could neither quite tame nor kill. He closed the chapter, and then, before he turned away, with one quick glance he looked round the church.

Alison understood it; he was looking for Basil. He did not find him there; the sudden eagerness died away as quickly as

it came. He turned slowly to the stalls, as the choir burst out into a magnificent *Te Deum*. Alison was sorry, very sorry, for him. She would have liked to have gone to him, and whispered, "I did the best I could for you. I told him you would be glad to see him here. I felt you would miss him if you did not see him. But, perhaps he will come some day. Be comforted!" But there was something in the father's face, as he had turned from the lectern, that said to Alison, "Past praying for!" Yet, doubtless, he *was* praying for him at that very minute.

Ah, if one could only hear the unspoken private prayers that go up to heaven intertwined with every public service. But no, we could never bear the sound; our hearts would break beneath that pathetic burden of intercession. But they go up always, all the same. It came to Alison then, that she, too, must pray for Basil Penrose.

In due time there was the sermon. It had grown so cloudy that the beadle had

lighted the candles in the pulpit under the great carved oak sounding-board. Again, as the Rector of Low Kelvingham stood up in the pulpit, his eyes swept round the church, penetrating every gloomy corner of the dark pews under the beautiful panelling of the walls. There were, all told, about seventy persons in the church; but the one face he was seeking was absent. Had he really hoped to see his son? Alison felt he had, and that he was disappointed.

The sermon was more interesting than the reading had been. There was a good firm outline; sentences carefully condensed and rounded, the whole leading easily up to the special pleading, which was strangely in advance of everything else, the financial position and the year's work of the society being stated with a clearness and force that made Alison say to herself, "At last, here is something like his son!" Yes, he was really more like Basil Penrose than she had thought at first; he grew more so as he went on. That searching,

always disappointed look. had won all her sympathy; she was growing really to like "the Rev." Where was that depravity about which his son had been so eloquent? where the villainy Mrs. Bayliss was sure she should find? Was this the man one would suspect of rapine, or of any other crime? How, then, had he managed to set his son against everything he held sacred?

These were a few of the questions that flitted through Alison's mind as she sat there, looking up steadily to the pulpit. Yes, there was something—something that, even to her, was irritating, and to Basil, no doubt, unbearable; there was an absolute dogmatism such as, in the course of her extensive ecclesiastical wanderings, she had rarely known surpassed. She never took her eyes off him. As he stood there, under the great canopy, with the candle light falling on his white surplice and grey head, how English he was; and Basil—he never seemed quite English!

"He married my mother!" Alison thought over the words as she gazed up to the calm face in the pulpit. They had never suggested a scandal to her pure mind; they *did* suggest a romance. What was it?

So the hour slipped by in the quiet church, under the little painted dome. The preacher preached; the gilded pelican went on pecking her breast, among the Grinling Gibbon's wreaths of the dark Corinthian columns that formed the altar-piece; the tired school children, hardly visible under the rich, dark wood of the wainscot, whispered and shuffled; and my Alison sat alone, with twenty hassocks and twenty hymn-books at her disposal, looking up at the pulpit, and listening to the father of Basil Penrose, her "dear fiend."

One moment more, while all is so still —one moment for my Alison's own face. But no, it eludes my pen; it always does. What is it like just now?—a little pathetic, a little severe, perfectly lost in listening,

very sharp about the corners of the mouth, very soft, almost child-like in its purity of expression. I cannot paint it for you. No one ever could; it is too incongruous. There, go and ask Basil Penrose—he is clever, he has eyes, he sees everything—go and ask Basil Penrose what her face is like. Or, better still, take a stroll across the moors, after sunset, with Alec Carruthers of Muirhead; he has not forgotten it yet; nor will he for a long while to come. Go and stroll in the dusk with Alec Carruthers; he will be able to tell you well by now. He has had plenty of time to think of it; he has thought of it until his spirit is—

> "Eaten out and in
> With the face of her, the eyes of her,
> The lips, the little chin, the stir
> Of shadow round her mouth."

CHAPTER II.

WHY?

ALISON had left the church, and was already as far as Clement's Lane, when a few drops of rain reminded her that her umbrella was still at St. Mary's. Alison was not at all surprised. "As usual!" she said. "I shall leave my head behind me somewhere one of these fine days, now there is no Jessie to collect me! I wonder how I'm to get through life without Jessie. I dare say my bonnet has been askew all the morning. No doubt I'm a sight to see and remember!" She turned with these words and hurried back to Abchurch.

The two clergymen were leaving the building as she re-entered it. She found

her umbrella without difficulty, and was again at the door, when no less a person than Basil Penrose himself suddenly emerged from Sherbourne Lane, on the west of the church, and made for the two rectors. Alison sprang within the dark lobby with remarkable activity. She did not want Basil Penrose to catch her there.

The rain had changed its mind; there was not even its pattering to break the quiet; and so, as she stood hidden in the lobby, she distinctly heard, across the open space, the well-known voice, so much its owner's own, asking—

"Well, and how's the Rev.?"

"My dear boy! Where on earth did you spring from?"

"Oh, from nowhere on earth; from my usual habitat—Tartarus. I say, Rev., you're a comin' along o' me!"

"The Rev." had turned at the sound of his son's footsteps, his own face flushing with delight.

Alison heard the words; then the voices grew distant. She ventured to peep out. The three men were walking along Abchurch Lane, Basil having taken hold of his father's arm—or rather, sleeve—as if he were a policeman, who had just taken the Rector of Low Kelvingham in charge for embezzling the Communion money, and was about to march him to prison, or to "his usual habitat," or to the deepest dungeon of the Tower. There was something about the expression of the secular hand grasping the clerical sleeve that immensely amused Alison, who, after the solemnity of the morning, was now feeling a reaction towards frivolity.

"Going to shut up, miss," remarked the beadle.

"Oh, one moment more, please!" exclaimed Alison, watching the retreating figures.

Fortunately, they turned the corner before the functionary's impatience, and her own

dread of being seen, had time to culminate in the lavishing of one of the few shillings that just then constituted her little all. It was, you must remember, not long after Jessie's wedding, and weddings make heavy demands upon one's ready money. Besides which, Alison helped, as I have already said, in a Mission that worked in the poverty-stricken neighbourhood beside the Docks; so that her spending opportunities were always far in advance of her pecuniary resources; and when she lavished a shilling of her own, she always felt as if she were robbing some starving creature. The instant, therefore, the three men were out of sight, she ran round the corner of the church, and into that Sherbourne Lane behind it, whence Basil Penrose had suddenly appeared, as fast as she could, not feeling at all sure that the intervening houses could shield her from the Argus eyes of Basil Penrose.

She wound through Sherbourne Lane into King William's Street, but did not

dare to go towards the Statue, which was her most direct way home, for fear the Argus eyes might happen to look up that way when they came to the junction of King William's Street with Cannon Street. She hurried, therefore, across the broad road, along which a few omnibuses and a cab or two were all that reminded one of its crowded normal condition, followed Abchurch Lane into Lombard Street, and so went to Tower Hill by Fenchurch Street, Mark Lane, Hart Street, Seething Lane, Catherine Court, near her own home, where she found Uncle John pacing slowly, with his head bowed in profound meditation, up and down between the two tall rows of early Georgian houses that stand on each side of the broad pavement. Apparently, he was the only living creature in Catherine Court until Alison disturbed his solitude. He turned at the sound of her quick footfall. Alison had been haunted all the while by the fear that Basil Penrose might spring out upon her

from some odd corner or another. She was thankful, therefore, to see John Harbuckle again. He was the one person in the world of whose sympathy she always felt sure. He went gravely and slowly to meet her.

"Well, my dear, then you haven't been to Abchurch?" he asked as they met.

There was something so wistful in his tone, in his face. Alison knew at once he had been thinking of that Jessie that once had been his; the Jessie who used, in days long gone by, to live in a house in this very court—the house they would pass in a moment or two—the one opposite the horizontal lamp rod, where still hangs the old-fashioned, gridiron-like appendage, against which the lamp-lighter of other days used to place his ladder. There was the long, narrow first floor window, flush with the wall, where they had sat together. There the much worn steps, across which she had come to meet him, first as a child, then as his betrothed;

across which she had passed as Arthur Bayliss's bride, when she had doomed John Harbuckle, a young man then, to perpetual bachelorhood; for he was not a man to whom such a love as he had for her could come a second time.

It was all over now; she and her husband both were dead. He had forgiven them both; how fully, God and his own heart knew. They had let him help their Jessie, the girl he had, not long since, given away to Mac Carruthers, in the old church of St. Olave's, hard by. It was all right, all for the best, all as it should be; but he felt the loss of his Jessie's Jessie very acutely. That was why he had changed the position of the furniture after the wedding, as one does after a funeral; that was, perhaps, why Alison had found him pacing up and down Catherine Court. But the haunting of Catherine Court was chronic to him now. Alison quite understood Uncle John's feeling in this matter, although it was never alluded to by either

of them: it was the strongest link of the strong sympathy that united them.

"Well, my dear, then you haven't been to Abchurch after all?" said Uncle John, as he met Alison.

"Oh, yes, I have," Alison replied, taking his arm and falling into his pace. "Yes, I have; but—" she hesitated—"I didn't come quite straight home. Why didn't you come with me, Uncle John?"

"I didn't know you wanted me, my dear," said John Harbuckle humbly. "I should have rather liked to have heard that young man's father; but I may possibly have another opportunity."

"They are not at all alike," said Alison.

"The young man probably takes after his mother, or her family," put in Uncle John.

"But yet there is a likeness; I saw it after a while; not at first," said Alison.

"What is latent in his father may be active in him, and *vice versa*," said Uncle John. "That is often the case. Did you like the sermon?"

"I was interested in it, of course. He seems a nice sort of man. And, oh, so orthodox!"

"Well, it's something to be orthodox in these days, my dear!" said John Harbuckle dryly.

"Er—yes," said Alison doubtfully, bringing out the "yes" at last, with a good deal of emphasis. "It struck me as—I don't quite know how to put it—as so old-fashioned!" she went on, after a slight pause.

"As old-fashioned as the Sermon on the Mount?" asked John Harbuckle.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Alison fervently. "Not at all like that. That—that"—and she grew quite excited—"that is like out-of-doors, in Birrendale!"

"Atmosphere and breadth, you mean?" said John Harbuckle.

"Yes, yes! And, besides," Alison went on rapidly—"besides, you know, I never can think of the Sermon on the Mount as old at all; it's far, far away in the

future! We have hardly *begun* to work up to it yet; that is,"—suddenly remembering her companion's daily life of quiet unselfishness—"that is, most people have hardly begun it."

"A great many people have, my dear," said Uncle John gravely. "I suppose all the race will ultimately grow up to it. It is the religion of the future, more than of the past. Its universal acceptance is only a matter of time. I may be wrong, but it seems to me inevitable. It is what has to be worked up to. Well, well, my dear, if we don't move on towards home, we shan't get to our Mission to-day."

They went home. Alison gave her mother as matter-of-fact an account of the service as she could. It was followed by no discussion, Mrs. Bayliss being principled against encouraging her daughter in her evident interest in the young man Basil Penrose and his family, although she felt personally aggrieved that this principle had kept her from hearing the Rector of

Low Kelvingham. She felt she should always regret that lost opportunity of seeing Basil Penrose's father, and judging him for herself. She could not, therefore, help considering herself as an injured person, which did not tend to make conversation too brisk. Consequently, Alison and Uncle John were not very sorry to leave the house and go off to their work at the Mission behind the Mint.

When they were gone, Mrs. Bayliss took up the new number of *Good Words*—her favourite Sunday afternoon literature—which she highly appreciated, not only for its intrinsic merits, but because there was something about its Scotch flavour that soothingly reminded her of what she called "her place in Birrendale,"—Caulde-knowe, that house above the rushing Birren Water, which had so nearly been her ruin, but which, thanks to Uncle John's kind firmness, that she once had thought so cruel, was now the pride of her life. "If I am poor, if I have to live in the detestable City,

at least I can feel, that as the owner of Caulde-knowe, I belong to a county," she often said to herself; and she found in the thought deep consolation. The sight of *Good Words*—that periodical she knew so many of the Birrendale people would be reading at that very time—was always soothing to her on those Sunday afternoons in the City, which, in themselves, she so vehemently hated. Being quite alone, she took her *Good Words* and her soothing on the sofa. It more than doubled the effect. I do not wish to commit myself to the statement that Mrs. Bayliss took a nap, but she read the same passage over several times without distinctly grasping the meaning. It was so very, very quiet; the faintest rustle of trees, the occasional twitter of a sparrow, were all the sounds that came in through the open window. What wonder that when, after an hour or more of utter solitude, a loud double knock resounded through the house and along the road, Mrs. Bayliss was startled rather

violently? She sprang up from the sofa. "Who can it possibly be? No one ever calls on Sunday. Some one for John, I suppose," she thought, as she hurried to the bevelled glass in the oak super-mantel, and arranged with unsteady hands her widow's cap, which had got awry during its owner's soothing. Hardly had she time to get it quite straight, and place herself and her *Good Words* in an easy-chair by the window, when steps were heard on the stairs, the drawing-room door was opened, and "Mr. Penrose" announced. Mrs. Bayliss was almost struck dumb. After what had passed between her and that young man, was it possible?

It was possible. In another instant, Basil Penrose, who seemed equal to anything, was entering her drawing-room, accompanied by his father.

"Oh, if you please, Mrs. Bayliss, I've brought my father for you to look at," Basil said, as if the Rector of Low Kelvingham were a few patterns of materials which

he had forgotten to show on Friday evening. "The lady takes a kind interest in me and my family," he went on, addressing this explanatory remark to his father.

Now, as Basil Penrose himself used to say, "if the Venerable Nicholas calls upon you, the laws of society compel you to be polite to the Venerable Nicholas. In these days, 'Get thee behind me!' would sound rude; so you say with a bow, 'How kind of you to come! Do take a seat!'"

This is precisely what happened. Mrs. Bayliss, astounded as she was at Basil Penrose's coolness, inclined her head graciously, first to one, and then to the other, and in a quarter of a second Basil was curled up in a corner of the red window settle, while his father, in an easy-chair, opposite the widow's, was slowly turning his hat round and round, as he held it between his knees, and was talking as pleasantly as if he had known her all his life.

Mrs. Bayliss liked the rector; she

knew it at once. She liked him; more—she was sorry for him. He had the misfortune to own that very peculiar son.

"So good of you to let my boy come here," said Mr. Penrose, in that bland, easy-going clerical tone of his, the tone so different from Basil's, but the voice so like that curious person's.

"Not at all!" murmured Mrs. Bayliss, politely disclaiming all thanks.

"In a neighbourhood like this, it is such an advantage for a young man to have—ah—kind friends to look after him," continued the rector.

Mrs. Bayliss acknowledged the implied compliment with another bend of her white-capped head, and a little smile.

The dear, unsophisticated young man himself, so far away from his rural home, and exposed to all the temptations of a great city, was gazing out of window with admirable stolidity.

"I was a young man once myself," Mr. Penrose went on.

"Yes?" said the widow, looking up at him with interest. He was in the strictest clerical uniform. She loved a uniform.

"Yes; and when I first left the paternal nest, I remember how thankful I used to be to any one who was kind to me. Indeed, I still number among my best friends those whom I then met for the first time."

"Ah, there are no friends like the old friends!" sighed the widow.

"True!" replied the rector. "To a certain extent, true! But if one does not continually add to one's stock, where is one? What a very interesting neighbourhood this is!"

"Yes—that is, I suppose, it strikes a stranger so. They all say it is interesting. Is Low Kelvingham a pretty place?"

"I cannot say it is. It is as flat as a pancake—a regular ague-trap. There is absolutely no one to speak to, no society at all; and, as I always tell everybody,

I believe my parishioners are the most wicked set of people in the world."

"How very sad! But perhaps you have never worked in a London parish?"

"No; Kelvingham has been my only parish. Before I went there I was——"

Mrs. Bayliss was listening with all her ears, when the dear young man at the window broke in with—

"There's Mr. Harbuckle! If you will allow me, I'll go up to his den. I know the way."

"Certainly!" said Mrs. Bayliss, glad to get rid of him before Alison came in.

"You were a curate, I suppose?" said Mrs. Bayliss, as if continuing Mr. Penrose's statement.

"No; I never was a curate. I was a chaplain."

"Indeed! An army chaplain? My husband was in the 160th. We knew a great many chaplains."

"I never was connected with the army, and, under any circumstances, we could

hardly have been contemporaries. I have been rector of Kelvingham for thirty years. It is thirty years since I left——"

Here conversation was again interrupted by the entrance of John Harbuckle and his niece, who looked surprised to find a visitor and a stranger there.

"John, Mr. Penrose has been kind enough to call," said Mrs. Bayliss, as if the fact had given her the keenest pleasure.

"Very happy to see him, I'm sure!" said John Harbuckle, as the rector advanced a step or two towards him. "And your son?"—shaking hands, and looking round for the missing Basil.

"He has taken the liberty of going up to your study. I believe he has something to show you, or tell you, that he says will be of interest to you, said the clergyman.

"He always has," returned John Harbuckle. "My niece, Alison."

The clergyman opened his eyes a little wider. "Surely this is not the first time

I have had the pleasure of seeing you!" he exclaimed, looking at Alison as if trying to remember where he had met her.

"I was at Abchurch this morning," Alison managed to say, although she was as perplexed and astounded as if Raymond Lully and the Moneyers had appeared there.

"Ah, so you were!" exclaimed Mr. Penrose, his face suddenly beaming; and when he beamed he looked quite handsome, with his still fresh complexion, and his silver-grey hair. "You were there. I remember you distinctly. You listened to my sermon."

"Of course I did!" said Alison, beaming in return, in spite of her amazement. "I always listen to sermons."

"What a charming, charming accomplishment! Only, unfortunately, one meets with it so rarely. One values it, consequently, the more when one does."

Alison laughed and blushed at the

little compliment, and retired to the window-seat. The clergyman followed her. Having seen each other before, they felt almost like old friends.

"Do you know, when I saw you listening so intently this morning," he resumed, sinking among the soft cushions of the easy-chair opposite Alison, and quite near her—"do you know, I quite regretted you had not something better to listen to. You can hardly imagine how we clergy value one real listener!"

"Really?" asked Alison, looking up with a quaint little amused smile that was quite her own, but which hid, or tried to hide, much mental confusion.

"Yes, really and truly. So, you see, it's quite the fault of the pew when the pulpit is dull!" with which, Mr. Penrose turned a little, and gave his whole and undivided attention to Alison.

"Why did Basil Penrose bring him? Why did he? Why?" Alison kept asking herself, in the utmost perplexity. But

never mind why: she was only too delighted that he had brought him.

Uncle John retired to his den; Mrs. Bayliss drew her chair close up to her daughter, determined to get her share of conversation. The ice was effectually broken.

"Do you often preach in the City churches?" asked Alison. She had a natural faculty for talking to clergymen, and could do so easily. It is not every one who possesses this gift.

"Before this morning, I was never in a City church at all. They appear to have a character entirely peculiar."

"Oh, they are quite unique," said Alison. "I know most of them — the Wren's Nests, the old Gothics, the Nothing-in-particulars; nearly all of them!"

"How I should like to see them with you! My church is, of course, Gothic; but, like so many of our Suffolk churches, it was rebuilt towards the end of the fifteenth century."

"I dare say I could match it for you. We have still about half a dozen fine old churches left, just outside the circle of the Great Fire; for instance, there is St. Andrew's, Undershaft, where the Bishop of Bedford preaches, and St. Ethelburga, where they are sulking because of——"

"Before we were interrupted, you were telling me of your chaplaincies," began Mrs. Bayliss, striking boldly into a new subject; fearing that, if Alison and the clergyman got on to ecclesiastical topics, they might go on for ever. And Alison's mother was eager to learn something of the rector's antecedents.

"Ah, to be sure!" said Mr. Penrose. "I was just about to tell you that I left Beyrout——"

"Then, you have lived in Syria!" exclaimed Alison. "Do you know, something you said this morning seemed like the words of an eye-witness. It was like a flash from the East coming across that English church!"

The clergyman beamed again. "If I had you always for a hearer!" he said. He had a certain old-fashioned courtliness about him that was very charming. "Yes," he went on, "when I was a young man I was a good deal abroad; first as a tutor, then as a chaplain. I knew the Continent and Asia Minor pretty well, at one time; but my Continent was the Continent of the diligence and post-house, not of express trains and hotels; it was the Europe and Syria of thirty odd years ago. I was fortunate—I suppose I must consider myself fortunate—in my last tutorship. I was the tutor of the present Lord Birrendale, who——"

"What, Lord Birrendale of Birrendale?" exclaimed Mrs. Bayliss, with extreme interest.

"Yes. You know him, then?" asked Mr. Penrose, also with sudden interest.

"I have a little place of my own in Birrendale," said Mrs. Bayliss, holding her head the least bit higher.

"Dear me! How very small the world is, after all!" returned the rector. "And you know Cleugh-gill, the Birrendale's place?"

"As well as I know that Tower! You remember Cleugh-gill, Alison, don't you, darling?"

"Oh yes. It has a Corinthian façade. I don't like Corinthian façades in Scotland. I like the red sandstone houses with the 'pepper-pots,'" said Alison.

"Ah, so do I! You and I will agree on architecture, I think, Miss Bayliss," said Basil's father, with a more appreciative smile than ever. ("That's a good, intelligent girl," he added to himself. "I like that girl.") "But it's really very strange that my daughter, Mariora——" he went on.

"What a sweet name!" exclaimed Alison.

The rector smiled again, really quite affectionately this time. "I think so too. She is a dear girl. And it so happens

she is staying, just now, with the Birrendales."

"How very, very strange!" said Mrs. Bayliss. "And you, too, know Birrendale, perhaps?"

"I have been there several times. It is a delightful change after Suffolk."

"And I wonder—oh, Alison, I do wonder, don't you?—I wonder if you have ever seen our little house—Cauld-knowe? It is all on the ground-floor, like a bungalow, you know; and it's perched on a cliff beside the Birren, and there is a little winding path——"

"I—a—h'm—yes, yes; I remember it!"

Mrs. Bayliss grew for the moment almost young and pretty again. "Oh, Alison! He remembers Cauld-knowe! He has seen Cauld-knowe!"

She felt as if she could have kissed "the Rev.," as he sat beaming more and more with pleasure and sympathy. But as her sense of propriety forbade such an expression of emotion, she took Alison's

hand, and kissed that instead; Alison, the while, looking extremely happy, and, in the eyes of the clergyman, very charming.

"Well," said Mr. Penrose, rising, after a moment or two, "it appears that I shall not only have to thank Lord Birrendale for my Rectory, and, I think I may say, for my wife, but for an introduction which I hope——" he paused.

"Must you go?" asked Mrs. Bayliss, quite distressfully.

"I very much regret I must. My time is not my own to-day. The brother clergyman with whom I am staying will be expecting me; indeed, I have more than strained a point in leaving him this afternoon."

"And must you really go? You will come again, I hope?" said Mrs. Bayliss, quite gushingly, rising as she spoke.

"If you will permit it, most certainly! And I am sure Mrs. Penrose will have great pleasure in making the acquaintance of those who have been so good to our son.

No, never mind about Basil, thank you. I must go without him. I really mustn't stay. I fear I am rather late as it is. Good-bye! good-bye! I am so very pleased to have met you, Mrs. Bayliss, and you too," pressing Alison's hand. "Let me know when you are coming to Low Kelvingham church, and I will preach a sermon especially for you."

"Thank you!" laughed Alison. "But, Mr. Penrose, do you know the way back to your friends?"

"I think so," returned the rector, with a little hesitation.

"Oh, but mother, mayn't I go with Mr. Penrose, just to put him into the way? Because, if I don't, he might miss it; or, if he didn't miss the way, he might miss seeing Barking church, and that would be so dreadful!" She put the question eagerly.

Her mother as eagerly answered, "Yes, yes; go, by all means." So after more hand-shaking, Alison and Mr. Penrose left the house together.

"How much I should like you to know my Mariora!" said the rector, pausing abruptly, almost as soon as they had crossed the threshold. "By the way," lowering his voice, "did you ever hear Basil speak of his sister?"

"He did say something about her the other evening," replied Alison as vaguely as she could.

"Ah!" sighed the clergyman. "Poor fellow! He hardly understands her. And she is difficult to understand, I must admit. But she's an angel of goodness and beauty; and when she sings, really, I can hardly wonder that people think her more than half inspired! A little of your—you will forgive me if I am too personal—a little of your, may I say shrewd common sense?—to balance her, is all she wants to make her perfect. As it is, she makes me anxious, and, at times, almost angry. Extremes, I know, are the fashion of the day; but I was brought up in a temperate school. I am a moderate man, as my father was

before me, and I like moderation in others —temperance in all things. You would do my Mariora a great deal of good;" and the rector sighed rather heavily.

Was he, then, anxious about both his children? Had that sigh anything to do with those words of Basil's about the sister? Were they connected with his "Poor little chap! poor little chap"?

"You would do my Mariora a great deal of good," repeated Mr. Penrose, as he and Alison went into the passage behind Barking church, between the huge warehouses and the grave-yard where Laud and Fisher once were buried.

"I?" asked Alison, in profound astonishment. The idea of her doing any one good was almost absurd to her.

"Why not? You are made to do good to those you are with. No one could be with you without being the better for it."

The clergyman spoke in all seriousness, and even sadness. Did he mean—was it his thought, or only Alison's fancy?—did

he mean what it seemed to her he added, "No one; not even Basil"? There was an instant's silence. They both felt there was much they would have liked to say, that must not be said; their relative positions were as yet too vague.

"Is this the church you spoke of?" asked Mr. Penrose. "How extremely interesting to find it here, among these City warehouses!"

They talked about the old church that, from time immemorial, has stood near the end of Tower Street, and where the citizens of ancient days used to wait while their spokesmen went to the Tower, to know if the king could receive his faithful lieges. They talked of the old shrine of Our Lady that Edward the First had set up there; of Mr. Pepys' watching the Great Fire from the brick tower—the clergyman listening and replying with the keen, romantic interest that a well-read provincial takes in London, while Alison brought out her little store of familiar local knowledge.

Then they went down the steps into Tower Street, the old path through Barking Alley being already in possession of the makers of the great new street, and its old houses in process of demolition.

"Thank you so very much!" said Mr. Penrose, as they reached the last step. "Now I know my way quite well. Mariora has not quite your appreciation of ecclesiastical antiquities, but she will like to see your City churches, I am sure. And you will like to show her them. Are you not rather lonely here in this great wilderness of bricks and mortar?"

"Lonely? Oh no!" said Alison; and her mind was so crammed and crowded with thoughts and emotions that the idea of loneliness seemed absurd. "But I shall like to see your daughter here very much. I am so very fond of showing people London."

"I am afraid she will only care for the slums," said Mr. Penrose, with evident regret.

"I know plenty of them. She shall come to our Mission."

"Certainly; but I wish you could make her take an interest in your other interests. I like your other interests so much. Good-bye, once more! I am so pleased to have met you."

He held her hand for an instant almost paternally.

"And I you!" she returned very unsteadily, with a little bend of her head.

Then they parted. He went along the half-demolished Tower Street; she remounted the steps of the churchyard. At the top of them she paused, a solitary little figure, under the gigantic blank wall of the warehouses. What had happened? What did it all mean? Why had Basil Penrose brought his father there? What had he said to his father about her? What could it all mean? Only for a moment or two did she pause, and then she remembered that Basil might still be with Uncle John, and hurried home—to see him being,

for the time, the one thing to be lived for. Would he be still there? Surely, he could not leave again without a word!

She reached home in a few short minutes, that were long to her, although it seemed to her she almost flew over the deserted path of the Square. Basil had left. Again there was the bitterness, the intolerable bitterness, of disappointment.

She never saw him at all that day. Had he managed it on purpose? Was it pure accident? Why else had it happened? She was terribly hurt. Her mind and heart were beginning to feel the continuous strain—the never-ceasing pressure of that little word "Why?" Alison wanted to know very much why it had all happened; but no one could tell her, neither could she ask. The rest of the day passed by as a troubled dream.

She awoke in the middle of the night, hot and restless, unable to sleep again; so she sat by the window, looking out at the Tower of London, all bathed in summer

moonlight, with a broad beam falling right athwart Basil Penrose's turret. Could it be possible? Oh, could it be possible? Was there in him the turning to her, even by a hair's breadth, or by the faintest heart-throb—was there a turning to her? Over and over came the question; over and over her inmost being repeated the answer her brain dared hardly frame; over and over again the only possible response, that yet was no reply—"My love! my love! I love you!" It was she who loved—and he? It was her own heart that would not be silenced, that cried to him, "My love! my love! I love you!" She hid her crimsoned face in her burning hands as the words came surging up; she shut the turret and the moonlight out from her sight; but the words went on and on in her heart—"My love! my love! I love you!"

And he had gone away again without seeing her! What could he care for her? He could not hunger for a sight of her face

as she did for a sight of his, or he would have stayed. No, no; he did not care for her! But he had brought his father there, and his father had been kind to her, had flattered her, had treated her almost as if she had been his son's acknowledged bride-elect. "Why? Ah, why, why, why?" she asked, with endless iteration.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" said Alison presently, taking her hands from her face, and raising her head from the window-sill. "How I wish I could go to sleep again! I shan't be able to get on with my book one bit to-morrow! And I *must* get on with my book! How am I to help him if I don't get on with my book?" But the moonbeam was still lying athwart the north-east turret of the White Tower; she could not leave it. And always that one cry in her heart rose, over and over again, never to be forced back into silence—"My love! my love! I love you!"

CHAPTER III.

LOW KELVINGHAM RECTORY.

The Rector of Low Kelvingham did not hurry home on the Monday after his service at Abchurch, in the City. It was not often that he went to town: "And when I do," he used to say, "I like to make the most of my ticket." So he had gone to London as early as possible on Saturday morning, and had stayed as late as he well could on Monday, getting through a remarkable quantity of business and pleasure during the time; including Mr. Irving on Saturday night, the Grosvenor and Royal Academy on Monday, besides a meeting of the society for which he had preached, and sundry visits to clerical brethren and lay friends. The Reverend Basil Penrose could get

through a great deal in a short time when he thoroughly put his mind to it.

Low Kelvingham Rectory was situated in the very dullest part of Suffolk. The land for miles around it was flat and uninteresting; but not so absolutely level as to become picturesque, by reason of those broad, unbroken lines of earth and sky, stretching far away as eye can see, that the Dutch painters love so well, and reproduce with such sweet truthfulness. It was land more interesting to farmers, and graziers than to any one else: pastures, where countless sheep, and brown-and-white cattle browsed, in profound content, alternating just then with fields of half-ripe grain, or of mangolds, turnips, or cabbages, among which rose an occasional homestead, forming its only well-marked features.

As for the rectory, even the main road ran away and left it all alone. To reach it, one had to turn from the highway and take a cross road, which, having brought

one as far as the rectory gates, considered its mission in the world accomplished, and wandered off aimlessly, until, getting lost in a meadow, it was cut up, and finally extinguished by the heavy wheels of the farmers' market carts.

On the Monday of the rector's absence, a dull grey sky hung over the dull green country. In the wide rectory gardens a blaze of geraniums, in the beds near the house, tried their best to make things look a little cheerful, but only succeeded in their own immediate neighbourhood. The house itself was a good one. A large, comfortable, well-built, red-brick house, with a few acres of glebe attached to it. Given a thousand or fifteen hundred a year to keep it up on, the rectory might have been a very pleasant place to live in eight months out of the year; but as the stipend was only four or five hundred, and as the present rector had no private fortune, and, as being a kind and considerate man, he was anxious that his wife

and daughter should have some small provision in the event of his death, a large amount of screwing and pinching was necessary to make both ends meet. A man-of-all-work, assisted by the rector, kept the garden in fairly good order, and looked after the horse; the man's wife and young daughter did their best for the house. In the handsome dining-room, used only on state occasions, the carpet was rolled up, the shutters closed, the massive oak furniture—the gift of Lord Birrendale—covered with dust sheets. In the drawing-room, on the opposite side of the broad hall, brown holland was substituted, and the room kept in just sufficient order for the reception, without absolute loss of dignity, of the very few callers. A great roll of Brussels carpet stood at the top of each flight of bare stairs, but was very rarely laid down.

Through these closely shuttered rooms, and wide, uncarpeted stairs, one might have wandered undisturbed on the Monday of

the rector's absence. Silence reigned supreme; there seemed no trace of actual human occupancy in the house. Not even a dog or cat was there to suggest that, at that time, any one was living there. Suddenly, however, the silence was broken up. A door on the first floor was opened, as if by an impatient hand, and a shrill feminine voice, rising as it went on, cried, "Jeenie! Jeenie! You callit this makit the fire? Jeenie! Will you come this meenute! Jeenie, you bad gairl, vhere are you?"

"I'm coming, ma'am!" replied a girl's voice, from some far-off back premises. Then *sotto voce* it went on, "What ails that fire! She dew weer the life out of me, she dew!"

There was a clattering up the back stairs, as the miscreant Jinny, the daughter of the man and woman-of-all-work, ran up to the little sitting-room, where her mistress, Mrs. Penrose, was standing near the door, with a voluminous cashmere shawl draped

about her shoulders, and a long white veil of thin silk gauze, wound round her dark head. Mrs. Penrose uttered a wild shriek as the girl entered, knit her brows into innumerable wrinkles above her piercing brown eyes, that once had been bright and liquid as a gazelle's, and were still very fine.

"You callit that makit the fire?" she asked, clenching her fists and beating the air with them. "What you mean? That not makit the fire; that not burn at all!"

"Never knowed ladies wanted fires in July!" muttered the girl sullenly, as she began dragging out the charred sticks.

"July! Vot I care for July! I go die for cold just now!" exclaimed Mrs. Penrose. "Makit the fire queek! I sal die!"

"I must go for some more wood, ma'am," said Jinny, making a dash out of the room.

"Be queek! queek!" Mrs. Penrose called after her, and walked to the window. "Vot for I come to this cole-hole? Call this summer!" she exclaimed, looking out

on the melancholy trees. "Summer? Ah! Vy I come? Nevair varrum since I come here!" Then, marching back again to the door, she called aloud for "Jeenie." "You makit that fire good, queek!" she went on, as Jinny again clattered upstairs, with half a newspaper and an apron full of wood, and across her cheek an acute accent of smut. "These gairls, they must go school; head full of stuff-books! Ah, they cannot makit the fire!"

"Yes they can, ma'am," replied the unabashed Jinny. "That fire was lit all right; on'y you been and moved the poker, what I stick in front of it."

"You not talk to me, you good-for-nothing, you! You makit that fire burn; you makit it burn queek!" returned Mrs. Penrose.

"There, ma'am!" said Jinny, "you don't never touch that poker, and it'll burn right well!" and, gathering up the sticks that remained, she threw them on to the top of the blaze, and departed.

The cold, cloudy weather, "the severity of an English summer," as Lord Palmerston used to say, was too much for Mrs. Penrose, especially when taken in connection with the absence of her husband and children. She had had a friend with her on Saturday and Sunday; but the friend had departed early on Monday afternoon; since when, Mrs. Penrose had been growing more and more disgusted with everything, as the time went on, and the temperature ran down, and her loneliness grew more oppressive. Indeed, the stoutest-hearted Englishwoman could hardly have stood by that rectory window and felt cheerful on that July evening; and thirty years of Suffolk life had not made an Englishwoman of Mrs. Penrose. She was an Albanian peasant now, as she always had been. She had looked out of that window and shivered, until she could bear the cold no longer. Yet, as soon as Jinny had retired, and the fire was beginning to burn up, she felt obliged to go there again,

partly because it exercised a strange fascination over her, and partly because she was afraid that if she looked at the fire, she might again be tempted to use the poker, and break the charm.

A belt of tall trees, solemn and sad, hid all signs of the outer world, except on one side of the rectory grounds. That one side, as seen from the window, was occupied by the grey old chancel of the church, and a strip of churchyard, in which grew several funereal yews, showing black against a background of hay-ricks, and a foreground of tombstones. Immediately under the window were dejected flower-beds; beyond them, an orchard, where tall, melancholy pear-trees, gloomy and dark-stemmed, and straggling grey-green apple-trees, overshadowed long grassy paths, charming strolling-places on bright days, but on that dull evening, under that leaden sky, looking uncannie enough to be veritable ghost-walks.

"This land," said Mrs. Penrose to

herself, falling back into the dialect of her youth—"this land, where the sun never shines! It is because it is a wicked land, where they do not believe in Mary and the saints! Dreadful place! Prison! Accursed land of heretics!"

Perhaps, in the deepest depths of her heart, she was not quite certain just then whether she would not have had a brighter life if that horrible old Turk, who had once bought her in Constantinople, had been allowed to keep her. At any rate, she felt she would have been where the sun shone, where one did not need a fire in July. She was a strange woman to find in an English rectory, was this Mrs. Penrose. She had been very beautiful as a young girl, blooming like a flower, and fading almost as soon. Now, at forty-eight, not a trace of her lovely youth remained, except, perhaps, in the piercing dark eyes. She was years younger than her English husband; but there was some freshness still about the lines of his face,

especially about the clear-cut mouth, while every vestige of it had left hers long ago. And she had had a curious history, that little dusky woman, with the piercing brown eyes, and the figure like a sack. She had been going over it ever since her visitor had left. On days such as this, the one thing she recurred to—around which her affections entwined with the most passionate regret—was the long, unbroken summer of her earliest childhood, among the Albanian mountains, the bright, long days, that seemed to her now, as she stood shivering by that window, like centuries of heaven.

Ah, the blue, blue sky, so bright, so warm, so eternally cloudless; the green hills, the smoke-like tint of the olives, the luxury of myrtle, of pomegranate, of oleander; the figs, the cool water-melons, the vintage—all gone for ever! The two little girls—herself and her sister—who used to feed the silkworms with the mulberry leaves; the young maidens—still

herself and her sister—in their graceful costumes, winding off the silk into its little golden balls—all gone; all gone, for ever! The long, sweet summer nights, when they slept out of doors, under the great shining stars—all gone; all broken up by a horror of blood and pillage and bitter slavery! But that, too, was gone. Now she was Mrs. Penrose, as she had been for nearly thirty years; now she was the mother of Basil, the mother of Mariora; her children—yes, but not her compatriots! In this dull, grey land, no one was her compatriot; she was all alone. When the wind was in that cold quarter, she felt very desolate if her husband was away. She could talk to him freely about these things; and she did, when she was in a good temper. The reminiscences of his Eastern sojourn were always pleasant to him. His wife was all the romance of his prosaic life. She had given him a good deal of trouble at different times; but he was, in a way, very fond of her; although

he certainly would not advise any one else to repeat his experiment. "One has to pay too dearly for one's romance," he would have said.

The fire burned up. Mrs. Penrose went and sat over it, grew presently warm and tolerably contented. She drew out, from the bosom of her dress, the little Eikon —the picture of the Virgin, from which, in all the vicissitudes of her fate, she had never parted—and recited with much fervour several prayers that are not to be found in any English book of devotion; after which, she applied herself with great energy to turning over a collection of modern Greek and Levantine finery. This amused her pretty well, until the entrance of Jinny, who had come to set the table for the evening meal, compelled her to retreat to her bedroom adjoining, where, having carefully put away all her trinkets, and the straight aprons with many-coloured embroideries, she proceeded to do her best towards transforming

herself into a British matron, by means of a very old black silk dress, made of mourning hat-bands, a fichu of Indian muslin and Breton lace, and a highly decorous cap to match, which she was in the act of adjusting with the most careful propriety, when the sound of wheels announced to her that her husband, "the father of Basil," as she very often called him, had arrived. A minute or two later, she heard his step on the uncarpeted stairs, and went into the sitting-room to meet him.

"You seen that boy?" was her first question, as her husband kissed her.

"My dear, I have!" said Mr. Penrose, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Ah! he please you well this time?" said Mrs. Penrose, brightening.

"On the whole, better than usual," returned the rector, moving to the fire, and regarding it as if he were glad to see it after his six miles drive from the station.

"He go to the church?" asked Mrs. Penrose.

"No; that was too much to expect, perhaps. But he came to meet me, afterwards; that was a step in the right direction, wasn't it?"

"Ah, I want to see him so much! How long it is that I don't see him? When will he come again, that boy?"

"I tried to get him to fix a day, but he wouldn't. Ah, I see you have had a letter from Mariora!" taking up one that was on the mantel-piece. "What does she say?"

"She say nothing!"

"Well, she has used a good deal of paper in saying nothing," said Mr. Penrose, scanning the letter.

"Sairmon! sairmon! She must preach always; and she know how I hate preach! And so many little books! Always she send little book!"

"When is she coming back? Does she say?" asked the rector.

"No; why should she come back and be very dull? Ah, what I suffer to-day!

So dull! so cold!" said his wife, holding her coffee-coloured hands to the fire.

"Well, I suppose we mustn't be selfish; still, I wish she were at home!" said Mr. Penrose, running through the letter rapidly.

"Yes; but you not makit it good for her! If you not makit it good for her she must go away. Makit it good for her, then she stay; then Basil stay! You makit it bad for them, they go," said Mrs. Penrose, using her hands freely as she spoke.

"Oh, did Mr. Jones give you a good sermon yesterday?" asked Mr. Penrose, by way of turning the subject.

"Ah, ah!" with a violent gesture of despair. "Half an hour, my dear! I thought I die! I thought I die! Why that man preach so long? I hate preach!"

Ten minutes later, when the Rev. Basil and Mrs. Penrose were dining, the rector looked across to his wife, and said, as if inwardly delighted—

"Well, at last, Basil seems to have turned his attention to a really nice girl."

"And th' othair one?" asked Mrs. Penrose, looking up from her plate.

"I did not dare to ask. You know what Basil is; and I was only too thankful to find that he had made friends with a respectable family. There's a little too much oil in this salad, my dear."

"Basil did ask after me?" said Mrs. Penrose anxiously.

"Oh, yes! He seemed in a more amiable temper than usual. He asked after everybody."

"He will get married?"

"I suppose so; but he never so much as hinted at it. He only said, 'Look here Rev., you come along with me!' Well, I couldn't go with him at the moment, because I had to dine with the Rector of Abchurch; but I promised to see him directly after dinner. So I did. He came and fetched me, and took me to see these new friends of his on Tower Hill. As

he never did such a thing before, I imagine that he wished to introduce his family to the girl's, and so put things on a proper footing. But he is a curious creature, certainly. Miss Bayliss was out, at Sunday-school, when we arrived. She returned about a quarter of an hour later, and as soon as he heard her knock at the door, he went off; he never saw her at all. A strange way of showing liking!"

"What you know of Basil?" exclaimed that young man's mother, with a good deal of contempt.

"Not much, I'm afraid. What does it mean; can you tell me? Perhaps you know him better than I do."

"He do what he likit; he say what he likit! He not tell you nothing! Grand man, Basil! Always do what he likit. Men of my country always do what they likit."

"Well, my dear, I've promised to take you to see them. I like Miss Bayliss very much; a thoughtful, intelligent, girl——"

"And th' othair one?" interrupted Mrs. Penrose, looking across the table to her husband again, the smouldering fire in her dark eyes suddenly flaming up.

"Well, we shouldn't be very sorry to see that other affair put an end to, should we?" asked Mr. Penrose blandly. "A judicious marriage is often the making of a young man."

"And th' othair one?" repeated his wife, looking remarkably like the young man at the Tower.

Mr. Penrose grew uneasy; he knew that look too well. "My dear, no one can have grieved more deeply over Basil's unfortunate entanglement than I have done; but I am not certain I took the right view of the case. I gathered from Basil, I had been misinformed. But if he has fixed upon Miss Bayliss as his future wife, I must say he has made a more judicious choice than I could have hoped for—a choice for which I should be deeply thankful."

"She will makit it bad for him—that othair!" exclaimed Mrs. Penrose.

"She will try to do so, no doubt; but he is not one to stand worry from any woman. As you say, my dear, 'he do what he likit.' If he has made up his mind to marry Miss Bayliss, why, he *will* marry Miss Bayliss, that's all."

"And you will be pleased?" asked Mrs. Penrose fiercely.

"Miss Bayliss would be a daughter-in-law I could hardly have hoped for. If he married her he would probably settle down and become a respectable member of society, which would be a great comfort to me; for I must say his erratic ways make me extremely anxious."

"Ah, my boy! He not likit this dull country; he not likit respectable! Respectable—beast of word! You Ingliss, you, you think you are so good, so respectable. Bah! you not better than the old pig of Turk! What you care for othair one? If I th' othair one, I kill your

naaice gairl; that's what I do! If I th' othair one, I kill her!"

The smouldering fire had blazed up, and was burning furiously. Mrs. Penrose clenched her fists again, and beat the air with them. Her husband, too used to his wife's little ways to be very much affected by them, went placidly on with his dinner in silence, while Mrs. Penrose continued to speak her mind freely, her English growing with each sentence more impossible to reproduce.

They were a singular pair, if pair two such opposite characters could be called. Mr. Penrose sometimes felt—he felt so just then—that he had indeed paid dearly for the one romance of his life. He almost envied the rector of the next parish, Kelvingham St. Mary's, who had married the daughter of a neighbouring vicar, quoted all round the country as the model rectoress. Mrs. Penrose had tried hard to form herself after this admirable lady; and as far as caps, collars, and,

to some extent, company manners were concerned, she had succeeded. But the cap does not make the British matron, far less the British clergywoman. When Mrs. Penrose was alone with her husband, she (metaphorically) took off her cap, and sometimes threw it at him. But would not the Reverend Basil have spoiled even the rectoress of Kelvingham St. Mary's, supposing that model of all the virtues had been capable of deterioration? There was an indolent easy-goingness about him that would have tempted almost any woman to try to reduce him to slavery. Mrs. Penrose, who, had she been left with her own people among the Albanian mountains, would, by this time, have been scarcely better than a slave herself—a mere household drudge, cowed and broken-spirited, on altogether a lower level than the men of her tribe—took a savage pleasure in attempting the subjugation of her English husband. She enjoyed few things more than seeing

him, "squirm," which happened pretty frequently when the wind was blowing from the cold quarters, and when all the country was a wet and solemn grey-green.

But although her husband "squirmed" under her treatment, he was never thoroughly subdued. This, of course, added piquancy to the warfare. Mr. Penrose carried his easy-goingness, like all his other qualities, only to a certain extent. He possessed nearly an equal amount of obstinacy. "You know, what so disgusts me in the Rev.," his dutiful son used to observe to any one with whom he happened to be discussing the subject—"what so disgusts me in the Rev. is, he's nothing but a bundle of short lengths; he never goes any distance with anything; he never carries an idea through. He's got the beginnings of lots of things; but there they stop; they never are anything else but beginnings! Now, he has really a fine turn for physical science, an uncommonly acute way of observing phenomena; but

after it's gone a quarter of a mile or so, it gets weak, and loses itself, like the road that runs past the rectory gates. It's just the same with music, languages, domestic affairs—everything he takes up. Even the professional depraving business doesn't flourish in his hands; he's little more than a petty larcenist, after all. Why, the poor little chap, Mariora, is a respectable brigand, in a large way of business, compared to the Rev.! But, mark you, I think he's a good sort of a father to have, distressing as it may be to own him; because, you know, the children of great men—that is, men who carry things through—well, their children, as a rule, are duffers; but I should like to demonstrate to you that it's the children of such men as my father who stand the best chance of rising. I have worked this out with a good deal of care; I could give you any amount of data. For instance—" And having thus begun to demonstrate, he generally went on as long as he could secure a listener;

and, somehow, few people ran away while Basil Penrose was demonstrating.

It was a curious scene, that evening meal in the little room—study, they called it—at Low Kelvingham Rectory. The rector, in his strict clerical uniform, his M.B. waistcoat, and tall, stiff collar, placidly resting and refreshing himself, after the journey and the exciting day in town; conscious that something had happened that had pleased him; conscious yet of a sorrow that would go with him to the grave; for he was really a better and kinder man than most people suspected, and his wife's bitter taunt had touched a nerve not yet quite blunted by many years' experience in a rural parish, whose inhabitants were too often a good deal lower than the angels;—the rectoress breaking off from her meal every other second, to flash scorn and hatred to everything English, from her dark brown eyes.

"Naaice gairl—lady?" she asked, presently. When she was in her present

mood she hated a lady. That her son should throw over a girl she would have called a peasant, for a lady, was an outrage to herself at that moment.

"Of course," replied the rector, with a gentle but decided movement of the head. "A lady, of course! A gentlewoman!"

"Then I hate her! Hate ladies!" exclaimed Mrs. Penrose fiercely. "In this land no gairl naaice if not lady! Hate ladies! Hate gentlewomen!"

"Oh no, you don't, my dear, when the weather's fine. That makes all the difference to your feelings, you know. I've seen you very nice to ladies," returned Mr. Penrose, with an attempt at conciliation. "By the way, I've brought you something from Liberty's. Jinny,"—as the young girl who did duty as housemaid came in with two cups of *café noir*—"fetch me my bag, Jinny."

The very room seemed to partake of the character of both its occupants. Two sides

of it were covered with books; good old standard theology, most of them, with a few new works, principally on physical science. In one corner stood the bureau at which Mr. Penrose wrote or revised his sermons. In another the Indian basket, mounted on a bamboo tripod, in which Mrs. Penrose kept her needlework. A window settle, long since painted light blue, but now showing much of the deal, was softly shaded by a pair of striped Syrian curtains; sundry bright pieces of oriental stuffs over sofa and chairs, and many fans and jars, relieved the dullness of the room by touches of pure colour.

On the walls that were not covered with books were a few good photographs of Athens, Constantinople, and the Holy Land, together with a small lithograph of Magdalen College, Oxford; a drawing of the Surrey Rectory that had been the early home of Mr. Penrose; and a small engraved portrait of the Dean—for there was a dean in the family. He had written a famous

article on St. Basil, and had introduced that name among the Penroses. He was the great uncle of the young man Alison Bayliss had met at the Queen's House.

On the mantel-piece, in *repoussé* frames, were a fine sulky photograph of that young man himself, an exquisite one of his sister, Mariora—the "poor little chap"—and between them—strange contrast to both! —the well-known portrait and autograph of Frances Ridley Havergal, a selection of whose verses, on different coloured papers, stuck out of the open envelope then lying on a corner of the shelf. Mariora's envelopes were always stuffed full of verses bearing the initials, F. R. H.

"You Ingliss, you not worship saints? Bah!" was Mrs. Penrose's frequent comment. "No, no, you will not pray to saints what the Orthodox Church tellit you to; you are heretics! you makit your own saint, then you must worship her. One must worship the saints; it is always so. Mariora, she throw that woman all over

the house! In every room is that woman! In her letters—always!"

Jinny presently returned with the bag, but the couple of blue Japanese vases it contained were not to Mrs. Penrose's liking, or she was in no humour to like anything. To-night, nothing would please her; she had a grudge against everything. "Why you not take me with you? Why you leave me in this hole?" being, perhaps, the true reason of her displeasure. She was not going to be propitiated by a couple of jars, of which she happened to know the very low price.

Her husband made no remark, but simply wrapped them up again in the soft paper, and replaced them in his bag; finished his coffee, and taking his daughter's letter from the mantel-piece, read it through attentively, while all the little leaflets went fluttering to the ground.

"Not a word about coming home," he said, when he had read the very last word of the long postscript.

"No, no; you not makit it good for her!" cried Mrs. Penrose, who was now nose and knees over the blazing fire.

"I miss her terribly! terribly!" sighed Mr. Penrose, for Mariora was the darling of his heart.

Mr. Penrose, who felt the room oppressively hot, had retired to the window. His wife turned round sharply—

"Ah! What Mariora say about your naaice gairl, your lady, your gentlewoman? What Mariora say about th' othair one? She fight you all! Mariora, she fight you, she fight naaice gairl, she fight Basil; she not afraid of Basil, she not fear nobody! She fight you all, will Mariora! You see, what I tellit you come true; Marion say what I say; Mariora say 'And th' othair one?'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE BRIDE COMES HOME.

After the many events—to her all-important—that had followed so swiftly upon the reading of the great blue letters on the notice-board of St. Mary Aldermary's, the church opposite Mansion House Station, Alison Bayliss had, indeed, neither cause nor time to complain, as she had done in the days immediately succeeding Jessie's wedding, of the emptiness, the dreariness of everything in John Harbuckle's house on Tower Hill; for her, emptiness and dreariness seemed to have fled away for ever. The difficulty now was to find time and space enough for all her crowding thoughts, and emotions, and energies, all so fresh and vigorous,

each one of which demanded every moment of her time, and every inch of space, from her very heart's core, to the uttermost limits of her consciousness.

How much had happened! She had seen Basil twice; he had shown her that he held the key of her mind; he had inspired her with pity, love, and fear. His manner had raised a perpetual question. He had set a bell going in her heart, that reiterated one unceasing "Why? why? why?" She had seen his father; she had learned a little of his family history; only a little, but enough to make her eager to know more. And having seen his father did not make Basil any less a mystery to her; and when, after a restless night, she tried to think of him calmly, in the clear light of early day, his conduct was still as incomprehensible as he was himself. Still, of one thing she felt herself sure. She believed that he was poor—poor for the sake of principle.

"I must write that book! I must do it; I can do it; I will do it!" Alison said to herself, on the Monday morning after the eventful Sabbath. The clamourous other thoughts pursued her in wild crowds; but with a desperate effort she drove them back, and determined to devote herself to her novel for *his work's* sake. "For his work's sake!" she repeated, over and over again. "For his work's sake," she, who had hitherto been but a dabbler in literature, would work at it with all the steadiness and seriousness of of her nature.

"Shall you need me in the house this forenoon, mother?" asked Alison, as soon as she had seen Uncle John go down to his office on the Monday morning.

"No, dear; but you've something on hand, I can tell. What is your newest excitement?" said Mrs. Bayliss, with a smile.

"What a fearfully transparent creature I must be!" exclaimed Alison. "There

is—there's a—a little bit of writing I wanted to attack, that's all."

"Your new poem, 'The Dragon on Bow Church Steeple'?" laughed Mrs. Bayliss.

Alison laughed too, but uneasily. "You are sure you don't need me?" she said. "Because, although Jessie calls me Mrs. Jellaby, you know I couldn't write a line if I thought I was neglecting my domestic duties."

"Ah, you'll never make a writer then!"

"Won't I? Well, I've a good subject, at any rate, this time. I'm going to try to put a girl on paper!"

"A girl! You deluded child! What do you know about girls? You don't suppose they're like you, do you?"

"No; but they *are* like Jessie."

"And have you the audacity to think you can put Jessie on paper?"

"I'm going to try. Why not? I know Jessie very well—quite by heart."

"I dare say! Better keep to your dear

friend, Mary Overie, who founded St. Saviour's, Southwark, before there was any bridge across the Thames. That's the sort of girl for you, and for Uncle John and his old cronies. I wish you would take up something more profitable than trying to put modern girls on paper. Believe me, Alison, you don't know anything at all about them."

"But yet I can't help thinking I do. Modern girls are—well, I dare say it's fearfully conceited of me to say such a thing, but I *am* like them in some ways. They try to do good work, and so do I. You don't need me, then, mother?"

And off she went to the den at the top of the house, feeling a good deal discouraged, and for the moment oppressed by that certain sense of isolation, of being different from other people and of having erred from commonplace ways, that too often haunted her; and which, no doubt, was principally due to the fact of her knowing very few young women

sufficiently intimately to be able to get at their views of life.

There were times when Alison thought, that to be exactly like every one else must be the summit of earthly happiness. "Why can't I be just like other people? Even my very clothes always look different from those others wear! How can I write what other people will read, if I am not like them? No doubt, they are quite right, and I am, as usual, altogether wrong!" Poor child! she had not read much modern philosophy, or she would have known—ah, with what delight!—that she was, even at that moment, on the highroad of Progress; that she had fairly embarked on the "passage from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous;" that she was no longer one of the mass, but had already advanced to a very distinct individuality, having obeyed the inner voice that had bade her "Come out and be separate;" that, in fact, she was herself—Alison Bayliss. Being a very imperfectly educated young

woman, she did not know all this; so she sat and vaguely blamed herself for faults she knew not how to specify, but which she felt might, unless overcome, prevent her book from being popular; and if it were not popular, of what use would it be? How would it further the great end of its being? How would it help her to help the work of Basil Penrose?

With these last words in her heart, she stood erect before the window, and looked straight across the square to the turret, where, she thought, he was even then hard at work. "But if I were not different from other people, would he have noticed me?" It came to her, almost suddenly, to be more contented with herself, and glad even that she was Alison, and no one else, and that, being Alison, she could help him. A shy maidenliness, and the proud womanliness—the dim consciousness of being the destined "help-meet for man"—gave a strange and tender dignity to her form and face that made her beautiful, although

she knew it not. Her eye fell on the slips of blank paper lying untouched on her desk, her gaze grew dreamy, and her mind, wandering in search of some local habitation in the which to put her story, went back, as was most natural, through the dale by the rushing Birren Water, on the bank of which she and Jessie had spent the years between childhood and womanhood. How she loved it all still! How the well-remembered forms came trooping back! There was the little grey bridge; there the brae foot, at which Jessie and her Mac used to meet; there the banks along which she herself had often walked with Alec Carruthers and thought it was kind of him to keep her from feeling neglected. To that same Birrendale the little note, in which she had acknowledged the flowers from Muirhead, was travelling. This evening he would receive it, and would be sad—oh, very, very sad, she felt now; for she had learned much in the last few days. It grieved her to hurt him, for

the instinct to shield was in her as strong as the instinct of helpfulness.

The dale lay before her mental vision; meadows, and stream, and human forms half-hidden, as if by the veiling purple of dawn. Presently her eager mind pierced for a while the mists that lay around the untrodden path before her, and it seemed as if, for the time, they rolled away. She saw "her girl," a vague, sweet young figure, like Jessie, but not Jessie; a fresh, new creation of her own brain; and behind "her girl" came her story. "Oh, gang wi' me!" Alison cried, her face brightening and sharpening with delight and eagerness, as she stretched out her own slight, but real flesh and blood hand, to welcome the shy young brain-maiden, and lead her through the fair, shadowy Birrendale that was smiling all around her. Then Alison sat down and wrote her short first chapter. "I wonder what Alec will think of my note?" she broke off once to ask herself. The question seemed to

spring up out of the deep, still salmon-pool, as she had so often seen a fish leap up there. "Did I know he was quite so fond of me? I suppose I did not." And then, like the leaping fish, the question swam on again and was forgotten.

* * * * *

Alison was just finishing her last sentence, when one of those double-barrelled letters the young married couple still indulged in was brought up to her. She opened it with avidity. The context was in Jessie's hand, the interpolations in Mac's. Alison still has it by her. I have had a good deal of difficulty with it; but I think you will probably be able to make something of it in its present form.

"Paris.

"My dearest Alison,

"As we are now on the verge of beggary, we propose returning at once, like the two bad shillings we are." ["*Two*, indeed! When she knows we were made *one* at St. Olave's! She means, like a bad two-shilling piece."]

"I must tell you it is all that wretched Mac's doing. He is so utterly reckless that I dare not trust him with half a franc, or he goes and lavishes it; added to which, if he is out of my sight a moment, I find he has been inviting the Continent of Europe to come and have a few days' fishing in Scotland, although he knows we haven't so much as an oat-cake left to give it. I'll never take him out for a honeymoon again; he's too trying." ["That's right! Pitch into him; he's alone and unprotected, poor wretch!"]

"Expect us to-morrow evening, about eight, *en route* for Birrendale; and you'd better have a half-crown at hand, to pay for the cab.

"With fondest love, and longing to see you (being married I am so dreadfully lonely: I can truly say I never knew what real loneliness meant before I was married. You can't talk to a husband),

"I am, dearest Alison,

"Your own dearest,

"JESSIE."

"P.S. [by Mac] You won't recognize me; my hair is grey with trying to take care of Jessie. The anxiety of having to protect a very pretty girl is terrible. It is well I look like a fighting man. We have been mobbed several times. Can't we make her ugly? You are clever; think this out, if you would preserve the life and reason of

"Your affectionate,

"Mac."

"P.P.S. [by Mac, at the post-office] As she has trusted me to post this, and there is no stamp on the envelope (I could not afford to waste one), I open it, to tell you that I have a couple of half-crowns stitched up in the lining of my waistcoat. She hasn't found them yet. Hope she won't until I have paid one away to the cabbie.

"She is more of a darling than my wildest dreams, etc. I don't mind telling this to you, but I depend upon your secresy. Don't tell: she might take advantage; but she's all my fancy painted her, and—but

words won't express the happiness of your affectionate cousin, Mac.

"As for her being lonely, that's the purest chaff; and as for talking—

> "'I was happy,' he said 'Unwed and young;
> But oh!' he sighed 'Her Majesty's tongue!
> The stream goes on for ever!'

"That man was a dolt if Her Majesty of his poem chattered as delightfully as my Queen, Jessie.

"M. C."

Now, I call this a most upsetting letter for a young woman in Alison's state of feeling to receive, don't you? Her emotions had already been stirred quite enough; this epistle simply sent them fluttering up and down, and whirling away like wind-driven leaves. It made her happy, it made her miserable; it made her cry—half with envy—not aloud, of course, not even in her thoughts, but somewhere deep in the innermost recesses of her heart, "Ah, how sure those two are of each

other's love! How sure! how sure! How happy to be so sure!" and she sighed as she felt on what a frail cobweb her own hope that Basil Penrose cared for her a little was resting. "Well," she cried, springing up, "I must run down with this to mother, and there will be sentiment. Then Uncle John will come in, and there will be more sentiment! Oh, dear, dear, dear! How I wish people—my people, I mean—would take things in a sensible, commonplace way! They are so romantic. I suppose one *is* romantic when one has turned forty!"

Alison was right; her mother laughed till she cried, and shed on that foolish, happy letter many and many a tear. "Dear things! dear things!" was all she could find voice to say, as she mopped her eyes with her black-bordered handkerchief. "I do hope they are not playing on the edge of a precipice!"

The young couple had had to pass through a terrible ordeal before they were

married. Soon after their engagement, Malcolm Carruthers had met with a dreadful accident, which had threatened at one time to prove fatal. They had both of them been very brave and good to each other. The doctors said that Mac was all right now, as sound as a roach and as strong as a horse; but there were those who did not take quite so hopeful a view of the case.

All business, other than preparation, was at an end as soon as that letter had been read; and so, about the same time that the Rector of Low Kelvingham reached home, expectation had been standing so long on tip-toe at John Harbuckle's house on Tower Hill, that she was almost on the point of giving up her uncomfortable position, and sinking on to the sofa in sheer exhaustion.

Out in the open country it was a dull grey-green evening. On Tower Hill it was duller, and the grey heavier and murkier, although it was July; so they lighted all the burners, and pulled down all the blinds as early as they could, without absolutely

insulting the daylight, by shutting it out. Then the old house looked gay and brilliant. Great masses of orange-coloured *Lilia rubra* flamed out of dark Japanese bronzes, among John Harbuckle's broad-leaved plants, in the oriental jars, on one side of the house; while on the other, a profusion of roses and ox-eye daisies turned the old City house into a veritable bower, fit for a bride.

It was like Uncle John! He was always so lavish in all that concerned Jessie. The worthy old bachelor could settle down to nothing now that Jessie was expected. Although the excavators who were at work on the completion of the Inner Circle had that day come upon several objects of extreme interest to him, it was, he felt, quite impossible for him to go up to his den, and write a long letter to a brother antiquary, so anxious was he to see Jessie, the daughter of his one and only love. He roamed from room to room, arranging and re-arranging his crackled jars and his

Wedgwood teapots; his sister, Mrs. Bayliss, and his niece, Alison, following him about, and trying very hard to appear deeply interested in his remarks and movements.

At last there was the rattle of a cab over the stones, a loud ring of the bell, and Alison rushed downstairs as fast as her feet would carry her; and a moment or two later, she and Jessie were locked in each other's arms so tightly one would have thought nothing could ever unlock them again.

"Oh, Jessie! Oh, Mac!" exclaimed Alison, stretching out a hand to Mac from Jessie's shoulder. "The way I've missed you, Jessie!" At the moment, she felt she was speaking the truth.

"The way I've missed you, Alison!" echoed Jessie, between a shower of kisses.

"Oh, Jessie! the dreariness of everything without you!" returned Alison, with more kisses.

"Good Heavens! Mac, the man's smashing my ark!" exclaimed the bride, dis-

engaging herself from her cousin with amazing promptitude. "Idiot darling!" she went on, flying at her husband, and seizing him by the shoulders. "Dont you see, there's only half the door open? Here, quick! unbolt this other half, will you? Mind, mind! that ark's only wicker. Wait till the door's open. There, that's right!"

"Call it a trunk; I calls it a 'ouse! Reg'lar croolty to animals!" grumbled the cabman, as he at last managed to get the shiny black mountain into the hall.

"What that sarcophagus has cost us! There'll be an extra shilling gone bang again," sighed Mac, as the man disappeared to fetch more luggage.

"A shilling! You wretched Mac, you don't know how to throw your money away fast enough! A shilling! such beggars as we are, too! *Sixpence* extra is heaps! Heaps! You shan't give him a penny more! Do you hear, Mac? Not one penny more!"

"Hear? I should think so! Oh, Alison,

what I have suffered!" cried Mac, holding up both his hands, and then diving out of the door to help the cabman. "But she's worth it," he returned for a second to add.

"Well, come upstairs, Jessie. Leave him to look after the gear," pleaded Alison, eager to get her cousin to herself.

"Leave him!" cried Jessie, with horror. "Bless you, my child, you don't know what a husband is! You can't have any idea of those sort of creatures. He'll ruin every bonnet in my box! I have to be after him every minute. Don't get married, Alison; you'd never stand it! It's too wearying!"

"Ah, my darling! So glad to see you again!" said Mrs. Bayliss—who had been longer getting down than her daughter had been—embracing her niece fondly.

"There's not much left of me to see, auntie!" sighed Jessie merrily. "I'm just one rag! The crossing was fearful. Oh, Uncle John, why didn't you meet us in Paris, and improve our minds? We've been

so frivolous! and I just hate frivolity now! I'll go out prowling with you, Uncle John; I'll go and look at bits of Old London with you. I'll—Mac! Mac! oh, pray be careful! That's my very best! My hair's turning grey, Uncle John! I'll never take Mac out for a honeymoon again, never! But, oh! *haven't* we had a good time?" she cried, opening her brilliant eyes to their fullest extent, then shutting them, and screwing them up tightly; and nodding her pretty head with a rapid tremolo movement as she added, with emphasis, "Just!"

How people manage to get upstairs on these bewildering occasions, may perhaps be imagined by those who have gone through similar experiences, but can hardly be described so as to bring it home to the unenlightened. It takes a good long while to do, if not accomplished by a rush. It took Jessie a very long while indeed, because she would keep stopping to abuse Mac, or to kiss Alison, or to pat Mrs. Bayliss's hand, or to call out something

complimentary to Uncle John, down in the hall, with the unfortunate bridegroom, who was fraudulently paying the cabman a great deal too much behind Jessie's back. The women, however, managed in time to get up to the drawing-room, where presently the men found them huddled close together on the sofa; Jessie, in the middle, looking so irresistibly pretty, that the hypocritical Mac actually—with that extra cab-fare weighing on his conscience—had the effrontery to walk straight up to his wife, put both his big hands under her dainty chin, lift up her lovely face, and kiss it before everybody's eyes, remarking as he did so—

"But, I say! Isn't she a pitty itty thing?"

This was very trying to Mrs. Bayliss, who had once had a honeymoon herself, and also to her brother, John Harbuckle, who had not. It also gave Alison a curious little thrill. Imagine Basil—oh no, no, no! Impossible! With Mac and Jessie it was

so very different. There was an ugly scar above Mac's left eye, dangerously near his temple. It was right Mac and Jessie should be happy together now; so nearly—only by a hair's-breadth—had Mac's accident proved fatal. They had earned a right to happiness, thought Alison; nevertheless, she blushed, as she violently strangled that dreadful thought of the impossible thing.

"Come, Jessie," she said, for she was nervously eager to have her cousin all to herself for a few minutes—"come and take your hat off."

Again it took time to get away; but presently the two girls were upstairs all alone. Jessie took a chair, draw it up to the toilet table, and contemplated herself for some moments, which she was capable of doing under almost any circumstances. Then turning suddenly to Alison, who was sitting on one of the old Florentine chests which John Harbuckle had bought for the girls, when they had come to him from Scotland, she asked, elevating her eyebrows

with extreme surprise and questioning, "Alison, why this thus-ness?"

"Which?" demanded Alison, smiling, but with another perfectly furious blush.

Jessie looked her cousin up and down, as if searching for the cause of certain very apparent, but as yet unexplained, phenomena. Alison was wearing the same silky mouse-coloured dress she had worn on her visit to the Queen's House, and a cluster of red roses, very like those Basil had immortalized. "My own flowers now," felt Alison.

"Don't!" Alison said, putting her hand before her eyes for an instant, and twisting away from Jessie's too inquiring gaze.

"But why this thus-ness?" repeated Jessie, as if bewildered with mystery. "Who sent you those roses, Alec?" she added, springing up and poking her pretty nose into the glowing heart of one of them.

"Uncle John," returned Alison. This was plain truth.

"Oh, dear! Is it possible?" sang Jessie,

sharply ticking off each word to the air in a burlesque opera in which they occur, and tossing up her hands incredulously.

"Fact, my love!" said Alison, twisting further away from Jessie's scrutiny.

"Still, the apple in the dumpling is unaccounted for, my sweet child!" observed the sage Jessie.

"Perhaps, oh, married woman, there's neither dumpling nor apple," retorted Alison, with a growing uneasiness.

"Don't talk nonsense, child, you can't deceive *me!*" cried Jessie, with all that show of authority the newly-wedded woman so loves to assume.

In spite of her growing uneasiness, the bride's assumption of superiority was more than Alison could stand.

"Oh, Jessie! You really are too funny!" she laughed; but, nevertheless, she twisted away from her cousin before she added, "Here, let me tug off your coat. Oh, haven't you just been spending pennies in Paris!"

"Mac would insist upon my having it!" said Jessie, as she slipped off her outer covering. "But really, Alie, what have you been doing with yourself all the time I've been away? One thing is certain; you haven't put all that has been going on into your letters; neither has Alec."

"I've been rather busy," said Alison.

"Rather! Well, never mind. It's all settled now; and I'm simply delighted! When is it to be? Of course, I knew on the wedding day he was dying to speak his mind; any one could see that with half an eye. But you might tell me, I think. You know how I love details."

"There are none," said Alison very huskily.

"None! then all I can say is, the milk in the cocoa-nut is still unaccounted for, that's all! I have *not* returned to the girl I left behind me. Alison, you are changed!"

"So are you!"

"Oh, don't say that! I was just as nice as ever I could be before!" cried Jessie,

turning eagerly to the glass and scrutinizing her face very carefully. "Don't say I'm changed! I should so hate to be anyone else! Well, at any rate I'm no uglier —am I? I should—I really think I should have to kill myself if I were ugly!"

"Ah, how I hungered and thirsted for beauty after you left me!" exclaimed Alison, with a sudden outburst of enthusiasm.

"You darling! Oh, you were always so good at a compliment!" cried Jessie fervently. "I tell Mac he doesn't flatter me half enough! Poor thing, he doesn't know what I've been used to!"

"Ah, 'Butter in a lordly dish!' There's nothing like it! But the best of my flattery is, it's all perfectly true, as far as it goes; only, in the present case, it doesn't go far enough. It falls far short of *you*, Jessie, as I've found to my cost, since you've been away, and I've had no one beautiful to look at! But, come, come! This won't do!"

"Oh, yes, it will though! Go on, go on! I never have enough!"

"But they're waiting for us. We really must go down!" So, laughing and chattering, they fluttered downstairs together again.

"Shall I tell you what has happened?" whispered Alison, just before they reached the orange lilies on the landing.

"Ay?" asked Jessie, turning round sharply.

"No, no; I can't. I—I've changed my mind," returned Alison, much under her voice.

"I know, dear! You've been and fallen in love! Never mind; it's made you ever so much prettier. And Alec is a good, dear fellow; and I'm so glad, so very glad!"

"That—that wasn't what I meant!" and Alison's voice was scarcely audible. "Am I really better-looking though?" she asked, a moment later, with the most charming *naïveté*.

"I should think so, indeed!"

"It's seeing you again, darling. It's the reflection of you!"

"Well, my reflection used not to be so striking! But what is it you can't tell me?"

"I've altered my mind. I was going to say, 'the girls' are gone. Perhaps they're not, after all; perhaps we two are 'the girls' still."

Here Mac appeared. "The time you've been, Jessie!" he said, and took her away at once.

"Ah, yes! the girls are gone, indeed!" thought Alison. There was Mac, taking possession of Jessie, his wife, and of all her attention; and in spite of that reiterated "No, no, no!" in Alison's heart, there was someone else drawing Alison away from Jessie. The old partnership was altogether dissolved; "the girls" were no more.

CHAPTER V.

THE GRATED WINDOW.

"I'LL just have a look at my dale and my girl before I go down," said Alison to herself the next morning; and away she stole to the den, where she regarded the folios she had yesterday written with the deepest interest and affection. The dale looked fresh and dewy to her as she read a line or two here and there. "But, ah, my girl! I thought she was pretty yesterday, but now I've seen Jessie again, this one looks quite commonplace! I must try to make her exactly like Jessie. And yet, that wouldn't do quite, because she is to be a different sort of girl—more rustic, more Scotch. I'll alter this, and this; I'm getting in a maze again! How is it

possible to put even physical beauty on paper, to say nothing of mind, and the way people talk! This being will have to talk and think. And then there'll be the hero; he'll have to talk and think. And how can a woman know what a man thinks about? Why, I've often tried to imagine what the tiny children in the street are thinking about; and I can't! I don't believe any human being can write a novel properly. How can a creature—one who is not omniscient, one to whom all hearts are not open—how can a mere mortal tell us what the simplest of our fellow-creatures are thinking about, what is the source of their actions? George Eliot. Ah, yes; sometimes I have felt, when I have been reading her, as if the judgment day had come, and the great secret books were opened. But that is supreme genius. How can I know what goes on in other people's minds?"

She paused, her book slipped out of her sight; she could only long for the revela-

tion of one man's mind on one point; she could only hear the din of that one bell Basil Penrose had set going in her heart—that one ever-recurring question, "Why, why?" She lingered up there in the den, for she shrank strangely from meeting Jessie. She felt herself to be so transparent, so incapable of concealing her feelings. She knew her whole nature had been strangely awakened during her cousin's absence; but until last night, when she and Jessie had whispered together on the stairs, she had not been aware how patent was the change in her.

Happily for her, when she entered the dining-room, she found the young couple sitting together, side by side, in one of the narrow, old-fashioned window settles, quite absorbed in their own affairs; but Alison's colour was almost as unsteady as it had been the right before, as she embraced Jessie and shook hands with Mac, who could hardly spare time even for that act of common courtesy.

They were both perfectly kind to Alison, Jessie's sweet face beaming with delight, as she caught sight of her cousin; but they were also as perfectly concentrated in themselves and their own interests, even to the extent of making Alison feel one too many there, and of reminding her, very forcibly, how often before she had felt the same, and how very much oftener she would have felt it, had it not been for Mac's cousin, Alec; "without whom," thought Alison, "I could, at times, hardly have maintained my self respect—could I? But how lovely, how very lovely Jessie is!" continued Alison to herself; for this good creature, far from being jealous, had now a fine large stock of fresh incense to lavish on the bride.

And, truly, Jessie looked supremely beautiful, as she and Mac sat there, hand in hand, with the morning sunlight falling on the crisp waves of her russet hair, and bringing out every bit of gold that lurked therein. The young people had a long

list of engagements for the week or so they were to be in London. "We're frightfully busy, Alison; we don't know which way to turn—and I, with all my things in rags!" said Jessie.

"My needle and thread are at your service; as usual, they will feel only too highly honoured—" began Alison, smiling.

"Isn't she a brick, Mac?" threw in Jessie. "And won't Alec be the happiest man in the world, bar none?" she added, with rather a wicked laugh in her liquid hazel eyes.

"Bar one—that's me!" returned Mac, with great fervour.

Poor Mac! His head was quite turned. After breakfast he had to go into the City and make sundry calls. From the difficulty he had in getting away one would have thought he was about to leave for the antipodes.

"Alison," he said, "I must ask you to take care of her for the morning. And will you see that she is ready to go out

with me by half-past two, without a delay of more than three hours?"

"Idiot darling! As if I ever kept you waiting! Times and times we've lost trains and boats through your inveterate habit of dawdling! I always have to wait for you; you know I always have to wait for you!"

"You *will* be ready then, Doodlekins?" he asked, smoothing her hand, which he was holding.

"I refuse to answer you!" Jessie returned haughtily, pulling her hand away with the words.

"Then I appeal to Alison," said Mac. "You will see she's ready by half-past two, won't you? We can't get to South Kensington in five minutes. The Inner Circle of the underground isn't finished yet."

"I'll do my best," said Alison. "I dare say I shall be able to bring her up to time."

"Ah, now I begin to appreciate what

I've lost in not having had a sister! Well, Alison, I shall leave her to you," said Mac lightly; and after returning several times, under divers pretexts, but, in reality, to look at his wife and give her another kiss or two, Mac took himself off for the morning, to Alison's great comfort and delight. Jessie, however, had to run downstairs, to tell him something very important, that she had almost forgotten; and there were more "good-byes" on the stairs. And even when Mac really did get away, Jessie ran up to the window, and watched him "out of sight."

"And now, Alison, we'll go a-needling!" exclaimed Mrs. Malcolm Carruthers, as she turned from the window. "I must have something to wear this afternoon, and something for the evening; and I haven't one whole garment left. But you, darling, were always good at the rag-bag."

So they went upstairs, and needled away for some time. Once or twice Alison thought longingly of her second

chapter that was not being written; but the habit of helping Jessie was too strong to be easily resisted, and it was, besides, such a luxury to have Jessie back again. They worked and chattered pleasantly enough until the Guards' band struck up on the Tower Green. They could hear the roll of the drums and a bar or two of the air, now and then, above the deep roar of the heavy traffic out of doors.

"It's just a lovely morning for sitting in the Gardens or on the Tower Wharf!" said Jessie. "What a pity we must stay in."

The Tower Wharf! It was too tempting. Alison, who had conscientiously shunned the Tower ever since she had met Basil Penrose, felt a strong impulse to take Jessie at her word. But it was so sudden, that suggestion; she could not answer at once. She turned to the window, and, seeing the turret, saw nothing else.

"Alie!" said Jessie. Alison heard her cousin's voice. It sounded as if she were

calling from a distance, so far had Alison wandered in one moment.

"Yes?"

It was so dreamy, so bashful, so uncertain. Jessie at once resolved, if possible, to follow any clue Alison might give.

"You're a brute, Alie! You are not taking a real interest in me and my clothes!" she whined.

"Yes, I am!" said Alison, her gaze wandering again, and her colour heightening.

"You always were an angel!"—rather an abrupt transition, but a trifle to Jessie. "Still, you are not telling quite all the truth, don't you see?"

Alison sprang up, and, forcing a laugh, said, "Mother will do all this. It will be a charity to let her; she'll love doing it so much! And, really, it won't take long. And—and—well, you know, I've had no one to go out with since you've been away. To be perfectly candid, I want to go out dreadfully. Let us go and sit in the Gardens, or—or somewhere."

So presently they went out, and they did not go into the Tower Gardens, for Jessie had sad memories connected with them; and they did not go into the Tower itself, because Alison was afraid of being seen there.

"The Wharf, I think," suggested Alison, very seriously, half-trembling at her own audacity, in going there. "But why shouldn't I go with Jessie? We used to go there so often!" she told herself.

"Mac and I were very happy once, walking up and down that Wharf—so we were!" said Jessie dreamily. "It was so pleasant, looking at the ships together—so it was! Let us go there. I don't mind the Wharf; it isn't eerie, like the Gardens. But you know I've never quite got over being frightened of the Tower. It is so uncannie! I always feel the Shadow of the Axe."

"'People's Guide.' Threepence only. Only threepence, the 'People's Guide.' No other guide wanted. Take a 'People's Guide?'"

"No, thank you; not to-day!"

"Views of London, one penny only! Only one penny!"

"Not to-day! Not to-day!"

"Really, Alison, this doesn't seem at all the place for you to be living in. These people are horrible! They seem to have grown ever so much worse. So frightfully, disgustingly grubby! I haven't seen such squalor all the time I've been away. Really, Uncle John ought to move! This isn't at all the place for you to be living in!"

"What, take Uncle John away from his Tower!" said Alison aloud; but meaning, "What, tear *me* away from the Tower! How could I live without it?" A feeling, not due altogether to Basil Penrose, for she had felt it—but with how much less intensity!—long before that memorable "at home," when she had first met him at the Queen's House. Is there, after all, some strange, mysterious affinity to human life in that mighty pile—some-

thing stronger than tragic memories? Are they mere dead materials, mere stones, bricks, timber, those walls and bastions, those towers and turrets? Dead? Ah, for one who has yielded to their spell, they live, as nothing else in London lives, and they will hold him in thrall for ever! Alison could as easily have believed herself to be dead, unsensitive clay, as that the Tower of London had no life.

The two girls paused a moment when they were opposite the Belfry, and looked across the Moat to the walls and roofs beyond, against which, light, curling wreaths of blue smoke from the casemates under the ballium, or outer wall, were being tossed and driven by a brisk wind.

"I don't know that I've seen anything much better than that dear old familiar view, after all!" said Jessie. "How very, very jolly it is this morning! But so full of odds and ends and bittinesses, isn't it? Perhaps I notice them more than

I used. But what a lovely colour it is this morning! Shall we go in?"

"Oh, no, no! Come down to the Wharf," said Alison very quickly.

Go in! What, go and walk about the Tower when Basil Penrose was there!

"More 'thus-ness'!" cried Jessie, turning.

They went through the outer gate of the Tower, and, being privileged persons, they safely passed the warders, who were actively warning off the public from the Wharf—as it is their unfortunate duty to do—and went on to the broad, massive quay, between Tower and river—that broad quay that Henry the Third built, in spite of the violent opposition of his Londoners, of St. Thomas of Canterbury—who, they say, used to pull down the work as soon as it was done—and, of course, in spite of the wishes of Father Thames himself, who, in those days, was not as used to boundaries as he is now.

In the corner nearest London Bridge, there is a little enclosure, grass-grown

and shaded by trees. There Alison and Jessie took possession of a garden-chair, and looked out on the great crowded river and its full tide. Alison dared hardly take her gaze from the Thames and its craft, so terribly conscious was she of eyes that she felt must be looking at her from every window in the Tower behind her. She scolded herself for coming, tried to tell herself that it was not likely that Basil Penrose, at work in a distant turret, could see her there. She held her sunshade behind her hat; but, all the same, she could feel the eyes piercing it. The Tower seemed all full of eyes that morning.

Jessie was silent for a minute or two; she, when Alison ventured to steal a glance at her, was gazing smilingly riverward, with her beautiful face full of wonder at her own happiness.

"Alison, dear?" she asked softly, putting her hand into her cousin's. And then there was a little wistful pause, during

which, in spite of the hum of London all around them, and the chip of the masons at work on the new coping of the Moat, they could hear the quiet lapping of London's river against its great stone wall—"Alie, what have I done that I should be so happy, so very happy? It frightens me sometimes, this great happiness. We don't deserve it, do we? I don't; he does! Oh, Alison, how good he is! You can't imagine how good he is! Even I—" and she opened her dewy eyes with an exquisitely lovely look of wonder and adoration—"even I—and I thought I knew him so well; but I didn't—even I am astonished at him! I can't understand why all this great happiness should be sent me. I don't deserve it, do I?"

"All of free grace, and nothing of desert," said Alison, very gravely and unsteadily; but in her own heart she felt that Mac and Jessie deserved all they had; also she thought of two others, who were not Mac and Jessie.

Now, while the little bride and that Alison of mine she called "the eminent literary lady" are sitting beside the full Thames, talking gently, but with many a strange current of thought and feeling crossing and recrossing each other, I must try to show you, as a whole, the great picture of which they form but one little incident. I wish I could put before you that whole perfectly, with all its life, its beauty, its breezy movement, its constant change, its enduring stability, its bright to-day blooming on its grey antiquity, like poppies springing red in a field through which, here and there, the primitive granite is cropping up. I wish I could put all this before you in its living colours; but that is not possible for me. Indeed, before such a task the boldest might well shrink; yet I love it too well to leave it altogether undescribed. A great, wide stretch of pale blue sky, piled high with masses of white cumuli, which the brisk wind is driving seaward—a sky beloved

by marine painters, full of form and movement; under it, the Thames, at high tide, its brown waters, just fresh from the ocean, reflecting, as it slowly rolls along, the blue heavens above—the Thames, from London Bridge to far down the Pool, with its forest of masts; the broad Tower Quay in front of the double line of hoary walls; the battlements; the low-arched Traitors' Gate; and, rising behind all, the vast White Tower of London. What a picture it is! Delightful to the eye, in spite of endless incongruities—all, however, sweetly harmonized, on such a day as this, at any rate, for the artist; and for him full of beauty, both of form and colour, even if his brother, the antiquary, shakes his head mournfully; delightful to the mind, by reason of its long, unbroken line of human interest, and its crowd of historical associations. Where can you match it? Where find another replica of this unique view, so little known, so even less appreciated, so jealously guarded from the sight of the

people whose national history is entwined around it for ever? But who knows it? Yet it is so near London Bridge that the movement of the never-pausing stream of humanity on the bridge can be seen and felt on the Tower Quay, although no sound of it can be heard there—so near, and so far out of our London world. Who knows it?

Our two little human beings on the garden seat are very small indeed among all this; but yet, so wide is quay and river, that it is only the jostling crowd of the Past that need oppress one here—that really gives one too much to think about. We will return to our girls, then, although, compared with the scenes they are among, their little lives, with all their strong young emotions, have hardly more significance than their fluttering garments. There they sit, Alison and Jessie, close together, the wind playing with the bride's creamy kiltings, and Alison's deep, blue flounces. At last, they have grown so

much interested in their talk; at last, they have so nearly forgotten all else, that even the "Why?" has been almost hushed to rest in Alison's heart, although it is there still. Jessie is sitting in the corner of the garden seat; she has turned to listen to her cousin; she can see the Tower as well as the river; her eyes wander to it, wander from the green, wide-spreading fig-tree against the grey outer wall, to the brown flint and brick of the Queen's House beyond it.

"Alison!" she cries presently, "Alison! there's someone beckoning to us from the window of the Gunpowder Plot room in the Queen's House! See! see!"

Alison turned round sharply with a start of sudden, eager wildness, such as Jessie had never before seen in her sedate cousin. Her eyes gleamed, her cheeks burned with an actual physical pain, and such strong heart-throbs went with these tell-tale signs, that even "It is the Princess!" was spoken in a voice that could not be kept steady.

It was the Princess. She was leaning out of a wide Tudor window, high up on the wall of the Queen's House, her deep red sleeves making a delightful bit of colour against its brownness, and her fair youth as sweet a contrast to its age.

Without a word, Alison rose and hurried away, Jessie springing up lightly and following her. They flew out of the grass-grown enclosure by the river-side, across the little iron bridge that spans the gay flower-beds in the Moat, through the gloomy postern, along the wall of the Queen's House, under the threatening portcullis of the Bloody Tower, on to the fatal Green, and so to the sentry-guarded door Alec Carruthers had once watched so earnestly. Without a thought, impelled by a force she never dreamed of resisting, Alison fluttered on, like a moth to the candle, again to meet her fate. But now, no music floated down to her from the open window, as it had done when she had stood before the beautiful arch of the

Traitor's Gate; no raven made her exclaim, "Never more!"

The iron-studded door stood open now. Beyond the wide hall one could see a cool, old-fashioned room; beyond that again, the glittering river, and a steam-boat darting past the window. The Princess was waiting for them.

"I was sure it was you!" she exclaimed. "Now I can show you the house."

"I want to see it so much!" said Alison. "This is Jessie. I told you about her, you know. She's married. She is Mrs. Malcolm Carruthers. She has just come back from Paris, where they've been honeymooning."

"How delightful! I love Paris!" said the Princess, shaking hands with the bride.

"So do I!" said Jessie.

They stood chatting for a few minutes.

"I can't show you the Bell Tower," said the Princess, after a while, "because Mr. Penrose is at work in it just now; but perhaps you'd like to see the Prisoner's Walk?"

"That sounds quite too charming!" said Jessie, as they went up the panelled staircase, on the walls of which Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were being married in a well-known engraving.

"It all belongs to this house," said the Princess.

"But did you ever see a ghost here?" asked Jessie. "That's always my first question of any of the Tower people. I am so anxious to meet someone who has really seen a ghost!"

"Oh no! I've never seen a ghost; only there are footsteps up and down the stairs all night."

"I wouldn't sleep here for anything!" cried Jessie, shuddering.

"I don't mind it a bit," said the Princess. "A little while ago, I heard the sound of digging, under my bed, quite distinctly. I used to hear it every night.

"It would have killed me!" exclaimed Jessie.

"Well, it didn't kill me. My father set

to work to find out the cause. He and Mr. Penrose traced it to the new underground railway. The men were working at it all night."

"But I should have been dead before they found it out!" said Jessie.

"Oh, Mr. Penrose very soon discovered the cause. When we had once told him about it, he never rested until he had found it out. It is his way, you know. He never leaves a problem unsolved if he sees a chance of solving it."

"How curiously the house runs about in all directions! I love a house with a number of passages and steps," said Jessie. "Have I seen Mr. Penrose, Alison? I don't remember to have heard of him before," she added.

"He is a great friend of Hugh Merriman's," put in Alison, as steadily as she could.

"Ah," thought Jessie, "now I am beginning to get light on the subject! I should like to see Mr. Penrose."

"That passage runs down-hill all the way," said the Princess, pointing to a long corridor, across the top of which they were passing.

"Everything is irregular here! Nothing is level!"

"That's the charm of it!" said Alison. "I hate houses where everything matches."

"But here we are at the Bell Tower," said the Princess, opening a door at the end of another long passage. "It is a pity we can't go in, because it is so very interesting. The Princess Elizabeth was imprisoned there, besides Fisher and Overbury, and many other distinguished people."

They stepped into a small wooden lobby. The Princess opened another door, and let in a stream of fresh morning air, and a marvellous view of London, such as no one, who had not seen it, could so much as imagine. They were on the top of the inner wall, between the Bell Tower and the Beauchamp. Jessie turned to the light.

"Oh, the Trinity House and Uncle

John's, all embedded in green trees! I can't believe my eyes!" she cried, half-bewildered. "And there are all the churches, and there's the Monument, and there's St. Paul's! And it's just like a picture, isn't it?"

But Alison, true to her archœological bias, had been attracted by an old inscription graven in the stone of the Bell Tower, close by the door on the other side of which she knew—and even the fresh, cool air could not check the hot flush that came with that knowledge—that Basil Penrose was at that moment working. She lingered a moment or two. She read—

"By . tortore . strange
My . trouth . was . tried."

"Torture" is a fearful word to read in the Tower of London. Alison hurried out of the lobby.

Jessie and the Princess were already at some distance along the Prisoner's Walk. The window of the Strong Room of the Bell Tower was just above the other

side of the lobby. She turned hastily, and glanced up, then followed the others. She had seen a dark head and face behind the bars of the prison window, and that head and face had been bent intently downward, on the work of a wonderful hand. Had he seen her? If he had, would it make the slightest—the very slightest difference to him, to know that "the lady of the red, red roses" was there?

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER'S WALK.

When Alison came up to the two other girls, they were standing just under a dormer window, the little casement of which was half-open. This dormer is set in a quaint gable, with a roof of beautiful old red tile. It is the one nearest the Belfry. You can see it from Tower Hill. It is called "Jane Grey's window." Fortunately for Alison, the other girls were talking about that best known and most beloved of Tower heroines when Alison reached them, and Jessie's face was full of pathetic tenderness. She put out her hand to Alison, as was her way when seeking sympathy, and said—

"She stood there, already dressed for her

own execution, and she saw them bringing her husband's body over Tower Hill! And she said, 'Oh, Guildford! Guildford!' She was ever so much younger than I am, Alison, and they had only been married so short a time—not much longer than Mac and I. And how fearfully near it seems from here to the hill. It is too dreadful; it makes me think of poor Mac's accident! It all seems so real when you look across the Moat to the hill; I can't bear it."

"Then let me show you the garrets, said the Princess, calmly; and opening a door just beside Jane Grey's dormer, they all trooped up some break-neck stairs, into what, in the days of our Tudor queens, was a row of little bedrooms, each with a tiny casement of "blobbly" glass, looking on to the Green, but which now forms one long lumber-room.

"What a place for ghosts to play hide-and-seek in!" said Jessie. "I can't believe that you never see ghosts here."

"Well, it is really very difficult to avoid

seeing one, especially on a moonlight night," said the Princess. "Of course, warders and servants still see them occasionally. I don't."

Presently they began to descend the steep stairs, Jessie and their guide going first, Alison following, wondering all the while if Basil had seen her. "He ought to *feel* I am here!" To go home without a word, after having seen him, was dreadful to her—almost too dreadful a thing to happen anywhere else than in the Tower. Suddenly a little cry from Jessie startled her, as she groped her way down in semi-darkness. An instant after, she heard the Princess exclaim—

"I believe, Mr. Penrose, if it were possible for me to be frightened, you would frighten me!"

Alison, on the garret stairs, came to a dead standstill.

"Miss Bayliss was here. Where is she?" she heard the well-known voice she called "picturesque" ask; and her heart gave one

great trembling cry of joy—"He has come! He has come for me!"

She stepped out of the half-darkness into the bright light of the Prisoner's Walk, and held out her hand to him with a glad, frank smile of welcome.

Basil was standing, hatless, under Jane Grey's window, by the side of the garret door, the wind tossing the thick, close masses of dark hair that overshadowed his face, his imperious head and figure boldly defined against the great banks of white clouds that were scudding over Tower Hill before the driving wind. He was Basil; he had come; that was enough for Alison. He had come for her; that was more than enough; that was happiness complete, as she smiled and held out her hand. He did not take it; he did not smile. He bowed quickly, as if grave and pressing business left him no leisure for courtesies that were not absolutely needed. Alison was not hurt. She wondered, but waited in faith, shyly, but with perfect trust in the all-

sufficient explanation she felt must be at hand.

"It is necessary for me to put myself right with Miss Bayliss; perhaps you will allow me to do so now?" said Basil, firmly, addressing the Princess.

"Then may I show Mrs. Carruthers the Bell Tower?" said the Princess.

"I shall be delighted, if you will be as careful of my lathe as you have hitherto been," he replied, with the same urgent business in his voice and expression.

So they went off.

"My poor Alison!" thought Jessie, "oh, my poor Alison!"

Jessie was looking quite pale. Aloud, she said to the Princess, "And who is that dreadful person? But, perhaps—" she hesitated, fearing she might have spoken too much upon the impulse of the moment—"he may be a friend of yours?"

"He is only working here," observed the Princess, quietly. "The men all say he is a great distraction. Do you think he is

handsome? Because, some people do, and others find him quite ugly."

"Handsome!" cried Jessie, in amazement. "He's dreadful! He—he's just like the Tower! He frightened me horribly just now. That's the face I've been haunted by all the time I've been away! I've met that face everywhere, all over Paris! Have you never been haunted by a face before you have met it in real life? I have been! I've seen that man's face, with my mind's eye, over and over again, lately."

"How far does your filial piety extend?" asked Basil Penrose of Alison, as Jessie and the Princess turned towards the Bell Tower. "It is necessary for me to know."

He stood perfectly upright, with his hands clasped tightly behind his back. There was no bending towards Alison as he spoke, not the very slightest movement towards her. Her shyness fled at that imperious tone. At other times, she had admired that lordliness of his; now, her answer involved a serious moral problem; she felt urged

to confront him, rather than submit to him. She drew herself up with severe but simple dignity, and said steadily—

"My filial piety extends a long way."

"Then why did you offer to shake hands with me just now?" he said, looking at her with a keen, bright glance, that she felt penetrating her like a sunbeam.

"Why not?" she asked, under her voice, her nervousness returning with a rush as she grew conscious, with a kind of despair, of the utter futility of all her attempts to hide herself from him. As she asked the question she raised her hand to her hat, which the wind was freely lifting, and pulled it as far over her own eyes as she could.

"You must know that your mother considers me second in wickedness only to the devil himself—if, indeed, I don't come first!" said Basil Penrose.

"You certainly proclaim your iniquities upon the housetops," said Alison. "But, perhaps, for all that, you are not worse than

other people. My mother is not used to—to——" Here she broke down, and began to pick out the crumbling old mortar from the parapet by which they were standing.

"She is not used to hearing the truth. I always tell the truth," said Basil, holding his head, if possible, a little higher.

"Do you, really? It doesn't always sound like truth," said Alison, still with a touch of severity.

"How can people who never hear the truth know what it sounds like?"

"But isn't some of it pure chaff?"

"Not an atom! I simply tell the truth. Of course, people don't believe me; they are too used to deceit and lies. Has your mother forbidden you to speak to me?" he added, with his most inquisitorial air.

"No," returned Alison firmly, but with a strange quaking sense about her heart. Was he going to extort some sort of confession from her? It was one thing to say in the depths of her heart, as she sat alone in the moonlight, "My love! my

love! I love you!" and quite another to be put to the question by him, out there in the noontide.

"If she forbade your speaking to me, would you obey her?" said Basil, continuing his interrogatory.

His thin lips, the form of which could be distinctly seen through their slight covering of dark hair, looked stern, almost cruel, as he put the question.

"She has not forbidden me," Alison returned quietly.

"And if she were to forbid you?"

The repeated question completely roused that obstinacy that few of us lack entirely.

"It will be time enough to consider how I should act when she does so," Alison threw at him, with a distinct ring of defiance in her voice. "Had we not better join the others, Mr. Penrose?"

She had longed so much to speak to him; but now the instinct of self-preservation urged her to fly.

"As you will! I should be sorry to

detain you one moment longer than you wish. But you have not answered my question. You do not understand how necessary it is for me to know."

He had a curious way of using this word "necessary," that seemed to raise the question out of the level of a purely personal matter. It was necessary, the laws of the universe required it; that was something of the idea conveyed. It made the situation more tolerable to Alison; she stayed.

"Yet it does not require answering," she said, detaching a little bit of moss, and throwing it down into the street below, between the outer and inner wall, lingering with him all too willingly.

"Will you answer that question?" he again repeated.

Her courage sank for an instant.

"I will not!" she replied, with a most emphatic negative.

"Thanks. That is better than offering to shake hands under false pretences." He

paused. Alison looked over the parapet at the barred windows of the modern prison, where they now lock up soldiers for mean, petty offences. "Was your mother satisfied with the credentials I had the honour of presenting to her on Sunday?" said Basil politely, but still with the same unbending gravity he had maintained all along.

"Your father? Yes, she liked him very much," returned Alison hurriedly.

"Are you aware that your mother turned me out of the house on Friday evening?"

"No!" exclaimed Alison, wheeling round suddenly from her piece of wall, with her face and eyes all aflame. "No!"

"It was so! The reason why I venture to detain you now is, that I wanted to lay the case before you. Are you of age?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Because, in that case, you have a legal right to your own opinion. Can you recall our conversation of Friday? Do you remember where I left off?"

"You were telling us about something brave your father had done. I remember; go on," said Alison eagerly.

"Well, that's just what I wanted to do on Friday. I wanted to go on; but your mother, fancying that I had something to tell that was unfit for you to hear, thought it wise to tell me her mind on a subject about which she knew absolutely nothing. I had, therefore, no alternative but to go. So I went."

Alison uttered an inarticulate expression of indignation. Basil had kindled her wrath against her mother to a furious blaze.

"Not that it made much difference to me," he went on. "I simply reflected that, as I was dealing with a mind—I suppose I must call it a mind—of the conventional type, I ought to treat it conventionally. That will account for my bringing my father for your mother to look at on Sunday. It will also account for my not being able to speak to you, or even to see you then. I

could not do so until I had explained all this to you. Other men could, I dare say; but I couldn't. This is the first opportunity I have had for putting myself right—perhaps, I had better say, for trying to put myself right in your eyes. I hope I have done so." He paused, and looked steadily at Alison.

"I am grieved you should have been annoyed," said she warmly, looking away from him, and across the street below, to the cannon, mounted on the top of the casemates opposite.

"I have not been annoyed; very far from it. And as it has called out your sympathy, why!—Shall we walk towards the Beauchamp Tower?" and with the last word he bent slightly towards her, his sternness all vanishing, and the set lines of his mobile lips breaking into a smile, that swiftly flew over the somewhat worn modelling of his thin cheeks.

With his change of manner, Alison changed too, and felt, moreover, that she

could breathe freely. "Yes," she said, with an answering smile, more radiant even than his. Then trying to get away, for a moment, from this too exciting conversation—"Isn't it a wonderful view up here?" she added. "How lovely St. Dunstan's looks—doesn't it? In spite of all the critics say, wasn't Sir Christopher right in being very proud and fond of that airy spire?"

"St. Dunstan is the only saint I care for," said Basil. "He had such a jolly way of tweaking the Venerable Nick's nose, and of chopping off the hands of coin debasers; besides which, he must himself have been a first-rate worker in gold. I'd like to shake hands with St. Dunstan."

"You haven't yet shaken hands with me!" said Alison, with a pleasant little laugh.

"That is a far more serious thing," said Basil gravely—so very gravely, that a long pause followed.

"Your father's story, please," said

Alison, when the silence was becoming more than irksome to her.

"Well, after all, that would hardly be worth your hearing, if it does not help you to a better understanding of me. It is necessary you should understand me, or you will be sure to misunderstand me; not that, as a rule, I care whether people understand me or not. The good opinion of one person in a million may, however, be worth having, if you can honestly get it. I am most anxious to put myself before you as I really am. I don't want you to look at me through your mother's eyes."

"I always use my own," said Alison, her tone assuring him, if he needed such assurance, how very true her words were, in his case.

"You see," continued Basil, "when my father was a comparatively young man, he was a bear-leader to the present Lord Birrendale; and one day, when they were in Constantinople, they went into the slave-market—this was, of course, a long

while ago; it was, in fact, in the year the slave-market was abolished—and there they saw two Albanian girls put up for sale. They were sisters, very young and beautiful; they were standing with their arms round each other's necks, watching in terror a villainous old Turk, bargaining for one of them. The Turk bought the youngest and more timid of the girls."

Alison looked up with horror at the speaker. "Supposing they had been Jessie and I, and Jessie had been sold!" she thought, shuddering.

"I will give you what followed in my father's own language," Basil went on, impressively. "'When the younger girl knew her fate was decided, the poor creature, disengaging herself from her sister's arms, turned round, placed her two hands on her sister's shoulders with a firm grasp, and looked into her eyes. No words, no tears could have expressed one-half the mute, unutterable despair of that long, heart-rending gaze.'"

"Oh!" sighed Alison. "Don't say they were actually parted!" she added, breathlessly.

"The two young Englishmen, being English, couldn't stand it. When the Turk who had bought the girl clapped his hands, as the signal that his property was to move off—when they saw the girl's arms drop powerless by her side, as she turned to follow her master—'Good God, Birrendale!' exclaimed my father, 'What's the use of money, if we are to stand by and witness this——'"

"And he saved those poor girls from being parted?" asked Alison, eagerly.

"They dashed after the Turk, bought the girl, and then her sister, sent them to a convent of French Sœurs de la Charité, until one of them died, and then my father married the other. My mother was the one that was sold. She is a great game now, I can tell you!"

"Oh, but how good of your father!" exclaimed Alison fervently. "To think

of his saving the poor girls from being parted!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Basil, drily. "A man shouldn't let his sentiments run away with his common sense, you know. It's a thing one always has to pay for too dearly. Besides, any one of the thousands of Englishmen who are this minute running to and fro over there, in the streets of the City, would probably have done the same. I don't think anything of it. The real pluck of the thing was in his deliberately marrying my mother, two years afterwards; and in his bringing her home to live in an English rectory. Now, that was plucky, if you like! You'd say so if you knew her; as I hope you will, before very long."

"I thought there was something I liked about your father!" cried Alison. "I shall never forget his being so good to those poor girls, never! I am always so grateful to any one who is good to a

girl—any girl! You don't feel quite like an Englishman, I suppose?"

"Of course, I'm an Englishman in the eye of the law," replied Basil. "But it's very odd, I never felt that I was an Englishman until last Friday evening. It was when I was talking to you about Raymond Lully and the Moneyers that it occurred to me, for the first time in my life, that I must be an Englishman." He paused, even hesitated—a most unusual thing for him to do. "I do not yet quite know myself as an Englishman," he added, gently and earnestly. For an instant, there was even a touch of shyness and humility in his altered tone, that, if Alison had then needed winning, would have won her there and then. "You will not forget my little lesson about Madame Herzog's song?" he asked, presently.

"Oh no," returned Alison, under her voice. "I owe you much for that lesson."

"No, you don't; you have already well repaid me," he said, with simple directness.

"I know you thought something very kind about me the other evening. That is one reason why I found it absolutely necessary to put myself right with you to-day. I hope I have done so?"

Here, fortunately for Alison, the wind, which was tossing Basil's mass of hair about, nearly blew off Alison's hat. Her answer was lost as far as the words were concerned, but her manner was quite enough.

"We haven't shaken hands yet," said Basil.

"That was your fault," said Alison, still struggling with her hat.

"No, it wasn't! I couldn't shake hands with you under false pretences. Of course, as a matter of common courtesy, one has to do so to other people; but then, it doesn't mean anything. I've too much respect for *you* to treat *you* in that way. It would not have been fair, until I had told you one or two things. And even now, it might involve your having to

chose between the fiend and the ravens. You have led me to believe your sympathies are with the fiend; if they are not, don't shake hands with him. That would be a fraud."

"Why can't my sympathies go with both? Both may have something to say for themselves," murmured Alison, again taking refuge in the moss of the crumbling purple brick of the parapet.

"You have too many sympathies; that is the mistake you make. You should get rid of most of them. Don't you see, they neutralize each other? Suppose you had to chose between the fiend and the ravens?"

Alison trembled as the question reached her; her voice failed her, she shrank from his gaze. "Don't you think we are talking nonsense?" she managed presently to say, stumbling over the words.

"*I* am not," he returned, his strong identity asserting itself more vigorously than ever.

Up there, on the high wall, under that

wind-driven sky, with the whole City of London at her feet, yet Alison felt she could scarcely breathe.

"You are not a fiend; they are not ravens," she said, as well as she could.

"And compromise is all you are, as yet, educated up to! Shall we shake hands, then, in hope of something better in days to come? We might go so far truthfully, don't you think?"

Her eyelids drooped over her modest grey eyes as she answered, with an unsteady smile, "Certainly."

Then their hands met, and Alison felt it meant, indeed, far more than mere courtesy. And Basil? If the Albanian mother, in Low Kelvingham Rectory, had heard her son's words, had seen her son's action, would she again have repeated, "And th' othair one?" As his hand clasped Alison's, did the face of any other woman rise between him and her? Certain it is, no faintest trace of reservation clouded, what seemed to Alison, his transparent

truthfulness, his extraordinary, his singular care, that they should shake hands in absolute sincerity. Strange as were his ways, Alison believed in him most implicitly; it even struck her that his views of truth and sincerity were higher and stronger and further reaching than her own. I am inclined to think he believed so himself. In spite of Mrs. Penrose, I doubt whether, at that moment, any one in all the world came between him and Alison; and I am perfectly certain that neither one nor one thousand would have made any difference to Basil.

"Really, though, they were too grubby!" said Basil, looking down at his hands. "I've been at work a good many hours. But you love work if it's good—don't you? Come and see what I've been doing; not that I'm in the habit of showing my work—even my 'pot-boilers'—to ladies, because I'm not."

"No?" asked Alison, quaintly. How proud she felt that he was making her

such an exception from his general rule, as, side by side, they went to the end of the Prisoner's Walk, along the top of the wall, past Jane Grey's dormer, and past the room where poor Arabella Stuart had died, mad and broken-hearted, at the window of which the Princess's maid was at work on a ball dress.

"No," he answered. "They only pretend to take an interest in it. I'm not afraid of your insulting it by pretending to care for it. I could trust my best work with you."

She thanked him with a bright, sympathetic smile, for the first time venturing to raise her face to his. He, too, looked bright, pleased, sympathetic, as they entered that little black wooden lobby, where some poor sufferer had once roughly chiselled—

"By . torture . strange
My . trouth . was . tried."

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE LEADS.

When Basil and Alison reached the Strong Room of the Bell Tower the door was standing open, showing a circular vaulted room of considerable size, lighted by several grated windows, beyond deep embrasures, through which the noonday sun was streaming brightly on to a strip of Turkey carpet, which gave to the worn stone floor the beautiful touch of warm colour it needed. Jessie and the Princess were sitting together near one of the embrasures, the Princess fondling a great, fluffy cat, which was nestling cosily in her lap. A very pretty picture it all made, only I doubt much whether either Basil or Alison noticed its merits just then. Jessie rose as

Alison entered—rose with more dignity than was usual with her. Alison laid a faltering hand on her cousin's arm.

"Jessie," she said, forcing herself to speak calmly, "this is Mr. Penrose."

Mr. Penrose bowed; Jessie inclined her pretty head the least bit in the world.

"Alison," said Jessie coldly, "we must go home at once. We shall be late."

"By what time must you be at home?" asked Basil, turning to Alison.

"By One," she replied.

"I will take care you are in good time," said Basil, as he went to his lathe. He set his foot on the treadle, took up a sharp-pointed tool, and proceeded to grind the point still sharper, his features settling down to the same expression of profound and absolute concentration upon his work that Alison had noticed when she had first seen him, as he had slowly turned the winch of the model of the rack, while Madame Herzog had been singing. It was the same lithe figure, the same dark, imperious

head; only now, instead of a background of pale summer flowers, there was a prison grating, and a sky full of wind-blown clouds. He looked at his work as if wholly lost in it. And Alison, she, too, looked thoughtfully at it. Only once she stole a glance at him, and saw the north light falling on the broad furrow, or, rather, the hollowed channel, that ran under his eyes and across the cheek-bone—the channel that seemed to Alison, who noticed it, hollowed by the wear and tear of constant work and never-ceasing thought. It touched Alison very deeply; it roused her sympathy for him to the highest pitch, as she stood in that old room in the Bell Tower, watching Basil as he ground an already finely ground tool to a yet sharper point.

"Feel that!" he said, as he stopped the treadle.

She took the little tool, pushed back the soft gauntlet of her glove, and tried the point against her fair young wrist. She smiled her appreciation of Basil's work-

manship, and handed it back to him. He took up one thing after another—tools, minute wheels, lenses—handling each as if it had been the Koh-i-noor, and showed each to Alison, as if asking her approval, the others looking on silently, and hardly noticed by Basil, although Alison was most painfully conscious of their presence.

It is a strange place, that Strong Room in the Belfry, and well, indeed, it is for those who visit it that its walls are so dumb. Once, the same north light, sure and trusty, that was then falling on Basil and Alison, as they stood together at the bench, had fallen on the red gold head of the lion-hearted Elizabeth Tudor. There, at another time, it had fallen on the venerable face of Cardinal Fisher, as he slept his last sleep, before he rose—the heroic old man of eighty—to array himself in his bravest suit as for a marriage day, "and that block and axe on Tower Hill, to which he went joyfully as a young bridegroom, saying, 'This is life eternal.'"

And there, just beyond the group we have learned to know—beyond Basil and Alison at the bench, beyond Jessie and the Princess—sitting so to speak, on the ground, at the end of the strip of Turkey carpet—was the great Bell of the Tower itself, an old, and weather-stained relic of the past, its work all done and over now, quietly surveying Basil and the girls. At a period far less remote, and in times less heroic than the days of the Tudors, domesticity had reigned supreme in the Bell Tower, and had left behind it vestiges, in the shape of a great laundry boiler, an aggressive ironing-stove, and the ironing-boards that were fixed in every embrasure, except the one with the north light, which was occupied by Basil Penrose's lathe and tools; while from a thick beam overhead, hung the gymnastic swing with which Alison's friend and guide had amused herself when she had been a fair-haired little girl. Truly, human life is very many-sided! So, too, are its habitations. Prison,

laundry, play-room, laboratory, and even (for an easel stood near the ungainly boiler) studio; and what else besides—who can say? —had the Strong Room in the Bell Tower been. Through it, for centuries, the current of human life had flowed; now strong with throbbing agony, then ebbing away into the shallow pains and pleasures of common existence, and the chattering of clear-starchers; now hallowed by the last prayers of the white-haired martyr, and then as hallowed by the innocent laughter of children. Ebbing and flowing, the stream had gone on for many a century; but it ebbed and flowed still.

"Mr. Penrose, I'm getting quite fidgety about the time," said Jessie.

"That is unnecessary. I have measured it accurately," said Basil, still handing things to Alison.

"I am afraid of keeping my husband waiting," said Jessie. Being but newly-wedded, the word "husband" was very pleasant to her; it had a charming fresh-

ness about it. She felt, when she spoke it, that the possession of such an object enhanced her own importance; and Jessie liked herself as a person of importance; besides which, her husband happened to be her Mac.

"For her husband's sake, I hope that Madame may always be in so admirable a frame of mind! The time is up now. I will go as far as the gates with you. I am afraid you could hardly care for the escort of a non-collar-wearing man further; and I should be sorry to hurt your feelings."

The Princess led them through the long passages of the old house again, passed Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, still being married, down the broad stairs, and so to the door at which Alison had once caught sight of Alec Carruthers and the ravens. They crossed the Green, and by the steps marked "Private" reached the passage between the dark Bloody Tower and the broad flight of steps that lead to

the Parade Ground. Here, unawed by the visitors, or the Guards on duty by the Jewel House, a small boy, belonging to the place, was in search of Mr. Penrose, and ran to him as soon as he saw him, holding out a wooden horse that had come to most signal grief.

"Hullo, Bobby! got something wants mending?" asked Basil Penrose, stooping down, and looking at the three-legged horse with deep interest.

"Bin and bokened his leg!" said the boy.

"All right, old man! I'll mend him. Give him to me," said Basil, taking the toy, and moving on with it tucked under his arm.

Alison was more than charmed with this little incident. In the deep shadow of the old buildings, she looked up at Basil with a bright, grateful smile, thanking him for his kindness to the child; and he looked down at her with an expression of singular contentment very rare for him.

"I have a gift for mending things," he said pleasantly. "I can mend almost anything!"

"Hearts?" asked Jessie sharply, but with much suppressed emotion. What could have prompted such a question at such a time? They were passing, in deepest shadow, under the only workable portcullis in the kingdom; the Traitor's Gate was facing them.

Alison laughed a low, uneasy laugh.

But Basil Penrose was quite equal to the occasion. As they stepped out into the full light, he turned to the bride, and taking in her whole pretty face and form with one keen, swift glance, he said, raising his dark brows, as if surprised, "Husband brute already, eh?"—a turn Jessie had not in the least expected, and which fairly took her breath away for a moment.

The dignity with which Mrs. Jessie marched along under the wall of the Queen's House and across the Moat, was a sight to behold. Basil was exceedingly

amused by her indignation, although he preserved the most stolid gravity until he had taken the girls as far as the last sentry box, when he left them without any lingering adieus. When he had left them, Jessie continued to march on with her dainty chin well up in the air. It was not until they had safely crossed the crowded hill that she spoke.

"Really, Alison!" was her first exclamation, and her tone meant to convey unutterable things.

"Well?" asked Alison, in an utterly limp and unsteady tone.

"The insolence of that man's remark to me!" said the bride.

"You courted it," said Alison.

"I could not help it! He is intolerable!" Then, after a pause, full of meaning, she asked, grimly for her, who was generally sweetness itself, "Is he to your taste, Alison?"

"He's so clever. He teaches one things —and I know nothing. Yes, he does in-

terest me very much," returned Alison, with a shy defiance, all her own.

"Ah, you never appreciated a simple, honest nature like Mac's—nor even," she added, as an afterthought—"nor even Alec's! I could see you all the time you and that man were going on together, up there on the Prisoner's Walk! Mac will be fearfully, fearfully angry, when he hears of it!"

"Really, I can't admit Mac's authority!" laughed Alison, very unsteadily. "It can't possibly matter to me whether Mac is angry with me or not. The idea of your threatening me with your husband's displeasure!"

"You're very cruel! You're very cruel, indeed!" exclaimed Jessie, as if desperately hurt. "What have you done to Alec? I wonder what he would have said to that scene on the Prisoner's Walk?"

"He would have no right to say anything," said Alison proudly. "Not the very slightest!"

"Do you mean to say you have thrown him over?" asked Jessie, with horror.

"Certainly not!" returned Alison, with an amount of spirit that surprised her cousin. "Certainly not! You know very well there never was anything between us. There was nothing to throw over. He is Mac's cousin, so I had to be civil to him; besides, he was kind to me."

"And this is the way you repay him, is it? You know—you *must* know—that he worships the very ground you tread on; Mac says so."

"Don't quote Mac to me! I won't have Mac quoted to me!" cried Alison, indignantly. "And as for Alec—I might as well say it now, once for all—oh, life with him would be intolerable; life with him would be just one long yawn! I don't wish to hear of him any more from you, Jessie!"

"Good heavens! And I going to meet my people-in-law next week!" exclaimed the bride, quite aghast. "And all our plans

upset—all of them! Oh, I could cry, I could cry! I'm so disappointed in you, Alison! And I believed in you so! I never, never thought you capable of flirting! Oh, I'm more shocked than I can say! There, all my day is spoiled, and—and so is Mac's." And with several angry sobs, Jessie took herself off to her own room, where she wept copiously.

"I know what those Muirhead people will do, dear," she said to her husband, to whom she at once told the dreadful news. "They'll marry Alec off to that Nona Adair; and, if they do, I'll never darken their doors. Never!"

"Well, they'll never ask you to do so, that's one thing," said Mac. "Don't cry, pet; don't cry! Never mind anything else, but don't cry!"

"Oh no! You won't care how much I'm snubbed, I know! They won't snub you; they can't, of course. And I thought it would be so nice to have Alison at Muirhead! And such a horror as she has

picked up, too! There, my day is quite spoiled! I wish you'd take me away, Mac!"

Poor Mac! He had a very, very bad time of it. And so had Alison, and Uncle John, and Mrs. Bayliss, and, in fact, every one in the house. There was a fine all-round row—tears, upbraiding, heart-burnings, misery; culminating, at last, in the invasion of John Harbuckle's den by Mrs. Bayliss and Jessie, who vehemently insisted that John Harbuckle must leave his business, and go on to the Continent with Alison and her mother, in order, as Mrs. Bayliss put it, "that the fatal spell might be broken."

"Go on to the Continent! Leave home! My dear Mary, how can you suggest such an utterly impracticable scheme? How can I leave home until the Inner Circle railway is completed?"

"Rubbish! Why, you are not even a shareholder! And Alison must be taken away!"

"My dear girl! Until the railway is

complete, I do not stir from Trinity Square. Houses, some of them excellent examples of the Rebuilding after the Great Fire, are every day being demolished. How could I forgive myself if I lost the chance of inspecting the interiors, and, perhaps, of saving some specimen of fine or curious workmanship? Not to mention the possibility of the excavators at any time striking upon some buried relic of Roman or Saxon London, which would be lost for ever if I were not on the spot. No, I cannot leave home while the City is in its present interesting state of transition. Its aspect, varying now from day to day, as buildings are removed or reconstructed, has charms for me, so great, that I am afraid I must run the risk of appearing selfish, in order to seize these invaluable opportunities, which will never occur again in my life-time. I would not, for instance, have lost seeing, the other night, that striking effect of the steeple of St. Margaret Pattens, with that foreground of half-

demolished houses at the end of Mincing Lane, and the men at work by the flaring gas jets, for any——"

"Don't say 'appearing selfish;' say, being the very incarnation of selfishness."

"I see no reason for modifying the original expression," said John Harbuckle dryly. "As for Alison, my advice is, leave her alone."

But this was in an early stage of the upset. For nearly a whole week, John Harbuckle was besieged in his den, and for nearly a week he held out; but at length Mrs. Bayliss actually invaded the office, and refused to leave until her brother had promised to take Alison to Belgium; so John Harbuckle had to give in. If any one could have watched him hanging about the excavations and the dismantled houses in Tower Street, that person might have wondered how, even for the sake of domestic peace, he could consent to be torn away from them. But after he had once given his word, he never uttered a com-

plaint; although he felt he was suffering bitterly from a deliberate act of cruelty, which, after all, would do Alison no good.

As for Alison, she was most rebellious. She refused to admit she had done wrong in any way. She was very much roused up altogether, and scribbled chapter after chapter of her novel at a rate that quite astonished herself, although she felt always in a tremble, as most people do, when a good, brisk family tempest is in progress. Once or twice she brought her work-basket. and wanted "to needle" for Jessie; but Jessie was haughty, and disdained her help; which she could well afford to do, as Mrs. Bayliss was always most eager to mend her up. Alison had, therefore, plenty of time to think out the meaning of all she and Basil had said on the Prisoner's Walk. Sometimes it made her very happy, in spite of the warfare around. Indeed, she was proud—quite triumphant —to be persecuted for his sake.

Sometimes as she wrote, the very fingers

of the sharply-drawn little hands, that Jessie used to say were made of egg-shell china, would pause in their busy work, as if to gaze and wonder at the memory of that scene on the Prisoner's Walk. Alison reduced that great picture—the City of London, the Tower of London, the River of London, the strong, boisterous wind, the scudding clouds, the two small human figures—simply to this, "He; I." The whole great picture she could take in, as the most ignorant peasant takes in the landscape among which he lives; although the simple, "He; I," was as incomprehensible to her, at times, as a mathematical formula to a child. And then, the grey eyes opened with wistful longing, the half-opened lips curved with unspoken questions. At times it seemed so dark, she woke up in the night and cried; but again, lighted up by a ray of her own love, she saw and understood it all, trembling with fear and great joy.

But the days went by; she did not see

Basil Penrose again all that week. What, after all, did their last interview mean? Was she putting a meaning into it Basil had never intended it to bear? Perhaps she was. She grew unhappy once more, despairingly unhappy at times, wishing she could bury herself and her blushes for having loved him too soon and too well, in the deepest depths of the ocean; and then, again, she was rejoicingly happy and proud that she had won his love; ah, then she would feel so sure of it—of his love! the love of that wonderful being, who was so great, so clever, but who yet could take a pleasure in mending toys for a little child! It was the same old story:—

"Himmel hoch jauchzend,
Zŭm Tode betrubt."

High as heaven one minute, low as death the next:—

"Du meine Wonne. Du mein Schmerz!"

To leave him then, to leave the chance

of seeing him, for a whole interminable fortnight, or, perhaps, three weeks! How young she was still! The cruelty of it, the unbearableness of it, seemed to make it impossible to happen. Tears would fall on the paper, and she had to leave off writing, so unbearable it seemed that she should have to go—to leave him when, in spite of all, she felt so unsure of his love. If she only knew! If she were only sure! But there were the trunks being packed, and she obliged to help; there was she, hard at work, helping to do that impossible thing! It was all a dream to her, a dream that was, however, growing into a nightmare; when, just after Mac and Jessie, and Jessie's ark and endless packages had been driven off, a very real thing—the first thing that, for some days, had had absolute reality to her—found itself in her hand. This very real thing was a little note, with the little grey "Tower of London, E.C.," as a heading. It was a friendly note from the Princess:—

"We start to-morrow for the Engardine. We shall be sitting out on the leads of our house this evening, if the weather keeps fine. It will be our last evening there, for this year; so do come over after dinner, if you can possibly manage it. It is so charming; and you will hear the Guards sing the street songs you delight in. I shall expect you.

"ELIZABETH P."

Alison read through the note twice, and then gave it to her mother. Mrs. Bayliss also read it twice before she made any remark. Alison had often wondered, as she passed that spot in Trinity Square, within a stone's throw from her home (now marked by one of the trellis-covered ventilators of the Metropolitan Railway), where, in the days that were earlier, they cut off the heads of distinguished rebels, how long, by the victim's measurement, that brief space between the moment when he laid his head on the block and the fall of the axe seemed. Probably about the

same time that elapsed between the moment when she handed her mother the note and the date of the reply.

Mrs. Bayliss, during that time, had rapidly discussed the situation. "If I say no, she will leave home miserable, and will be thinking of him all the time we are away. She will bear me a grudge, and widen the distance between us. If I say yes, they may meet, it is true; but they will be well guarded; and John shall take her there, and fetch her home. Besides, I like her to be intimate with her friend at the Queen's House. There are so few people about here one can know."

"I suppose you want to go, Alison?" she asked grumpily.

"It would be pleasant," faltered Alison, with such sweet confusion that her mother, remembering her own young days, could not help saying, far more kindly than she had meant to do—

"Then, go."

This was one of those inconsistent things

Mrs. Bayliss was capable of doing. The permission was given ungraciously enough; but it turned that day into one of the happiest in Alison's life. It was long, truly; but its hours had in them a linked sweetness of anticipation, a music, a poetry that transfigured every homely detail, just as, in the evening, when she and John Harbuckle paused for a moment to gaze, for the thousandth time, at the western front of the Tower, all unsightly incongruities were lost in the harmonious beauty of the whole, as seen through the exquisite glow of evening, that etherealized whatever it fell upon, in which nothing sordid or ugly could live, being transformed at once by its mere touch. It was not that she felt sure of seeing him; no; but only of being a few hundred yards nearer to him! Ah, well! Dawn and sunset must needs turn even the poorest hovels to fairy dwellings; young men and maidens must need dream their dreams. It is something to be touched by poetry and beauty, even

in dreams. They fade away, those visions, but they leave the dreamer changed, as the earth is changed by the transfiguring sunbeams it garners.

Alison found her friends already on their balcony overlooking the Tower Green; the balcony which the Princess preferred to call "the leads," as more in keeping with its surroundings, she said; although there certainly were "balconies" in the Tudor times, and ladies in them, as one may see by the works of one William Shakspeare, notably in his play of "Romeo and Juliet." It was pretty to see the ladies sitting out there, among their plants and flowers, under the quaint gables and barge boards with the White Tower looking down upon them.

"So glad you have come! We are off, to-morrow," said the Princess.

"And I, too. We are going to Belgium," returned Alison, taking a vacant Indian chair.

They fell into conversation; talked

about the Continent, Scotland, the familiar wandering grounds of the autumnal vagabondizer. Then, after a while, there was necessarily a little of that Tower "Guide Book," which, happily for the less instructed, is so much part and parcel of the life of the inhabitants of the fortress, that it never can seem intrusive.

"You see, Wren has spoiled the windows of the White Tower on this side. The original Norman ones have been restored on the east side, where St. John's Chapel is," observed the Princess, glancing upwards.

Alison's eyes followed hers, then went a little higher—as high as the north-west turret, above which the pigeons were circling, their wings making "light in the air,"—the golden sunset air.

"How charming it is here of an evening!" said Alison, still gazing upwards at the pigeons.

"Ah, but you should see it in the early morning!" exclaimed her hostess, the Princess's mother. "We went to a

ball, the night before last, and forgot to take the pass-word. When we returned, yesterday morning, the sentry absolutely refused to let us in without it. 'Are you going to keep me out of my own house, then?' I asked. 'Orders are orders, ma'am,' said he. 'And my orders are, to let no one go in without the pass-word.'"

"Then I tried to coax him," put in the Princess gaily. "I said, in my most winning tone, 'Oh, but, sentry, you might let *us* pass, I think! Surely, you must know who we are.' But even I could not move him; he was inexorable—wasn't he, mother?"

"Indeed, he was; but, fortunately, a couple of officers drove up at that very minute, and soon made it all right. Curiously enough, they had been our partners, an hour before; and as the morning was so lovely, we left our carriages at the outer gate, and we all walked up here together. The Tower looked really more wonderful than anything you can imagine.

In the dawn it looked quited ifferent, like some beautiful, strange foreign place. There was a kind of unearthly loveliness about it, altogether indescribable, so that you could hardly believe it was real. Even Captain Hamling, who isn't at all romantic, couldn't help saying, 'Haw! Her Majesty, Queen Titania's Tower!'"

"Mother, there is Captain Hamling again!" said the Princess, glancing towards the Parade Ground.

Alison's eyes naturally turned in that direction. Two or three officers, leisurely strolling towards the Green, just appeared beyond the angle of the White Tower; two or three others were hurrying down the steps, as if anxious to catch trains for the West End. Among the leisurely ones, who presently stopped and formed a little group, Alison recognized Basil Penrose, demonstrating, she could see, and with considerable vigour. Then the Guardsmen laughed; she could hear them. Basil turned away, and made as if he would descend

the broad steps and leave the precincts. Had he seen her? No—most certainly, no. The officers were strolling on towards the Queen's House. Basil had fallen into his usual quick pace. In a moment Alison felt, with a sharp pang, he would be gone; for weeks she would not see him, if once he descended those steps. She watched him eagerly. Could it be possible that he could go, and never know she was there? Ah! he has looked up; he has turned; he has rejoined the soldiers! In a few minutes they are all in the balcony, saying good-bye, "Bon voyage," to Alison's friends.

"I, too—I am going away," murmurs Alison to Basil, half-gaily, half-shyly, when, after duly greeting the others, he turned to her.

"You too! For how long?" Simple words enough; but the tone, subdued almost to a whisper, fills them to overflowing with meaning.

"Oh, not for long; for a few weeks.

To Belgium only; it—it is not far," Alison falters. Happily, the Guardsmen and the ladies are talking, so no one, except Basil, notices her broken voice, her sweet, drooping head.

"Not long! Not far!" Basil echoes, bending over her.

It strikes Alison it is all he can for the moment say. It makes her tremble.

"I don't wish to deceive you, or to waste your time and mine in useless compliments," he goes on, after a pause, in a tone more like his usual one. Then, more gravely, "But I shall find life not quite so interesting while you are gone, as it has been lately—since—" and again his voice changed—"since—" Alison almost wonders if he really says those words, or if they are but her own fancy—"since you came into my life. Do you know," very softly—"do you know you *have* come into my life?"

No answer on her part is possible. Before her lips can frame a word, a remark from

one of the others draws Basil into the general conversation.

The soldiers leave, others come, and they, too, go; but Basil takes up a position beside Alison's chair, and lingers there. He says but little to her, talking principally to the others about Germany—a country he knows well, and where, he says, "I have picked up what little knowledge of science I may possess." He is quiet—for him, very quiet; he does not demonstrate; he seems to have no wish to do so. Does he not know he has spoken enough? And so he has. Alison needs no more.

As for Alison, dumbness falls upon her; she says absolutely nothing; she only knows that he has taken possession of her—that she is his, that he is hers—and it fills her with a happiness words would but profane.

The sunset fades, the soft twilight encompasses all things, taking the scarlet out of the coats that are gathering on the parade. Presently there is a loud word of command; then, with the tramping of

many feet, uprises a tumultuous shout and roar of a well-known popular song, as a battalion of Guards turns the corner under the White Tower, clatters down the broad steps, and sweeps through the dark gateway of the Bloody Tower, laughing and shouting as only soldiers can, while they ring out the chorus of the comic song. The people on the balcony all laugh; only, Alison's laughter is strangely low and "*innig*," and so is Basil's. The two voices ripple together of their own secret happiness; they two—he and she—hear the meaning in each other's tones, low as they are, few as they are, above the noise of the shouting troops. Then the loud song grows dimmer; it wanders among the hoary towers, with their blood-stained traditions; it comes back to the listeners, now louder, now fainter, as the Guards march, singing, round the precincts. Presently it comes again, nearer and nearer; the tramp grows clearer, and quick again; the Guards once more turn the corner of

the White Tower; but this time they shout out the bold notes of "God save the Queen," with the full strength of their loyal British voices. The happiness, the pleasantness of that evening—how they abide with Alison!

Tattoo is beaten; the soldiers' day is over. John Harbuckle comes, and takes Alison away; but Basil goes with them—goes as far as her home, lingers with her until the door is opened, until it is closed, and, closing, parts them.

Her eyes dim with joy as she looks her parting look at his turret next day. She stands, afterwards, at Antwerp, in a great square, where the bright fruit stalls are. She gazes with wonder at the marvellous cathedral; but through its spire, so like tattered old lace, she sees always an airy Tower of London, and Basil Penrose—no longer imperious, but full of tender gentleness. She dives, at Bruges, far down into the long past mediæval centuries she loves so well; but that transformed Basil always

goes with her. She hears the endless carillons; but always they ring out the same old chime: "Do you know you have come into my life?" "Ah, I know it, I know it, I know it! And you into mine!"

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSIE'S "PEOPLE-IN-LAW."

Not without many a misgiving did Mrs. Malcolm Carruthers pass the gates of Muirhead.

"I feel so lonely and unprotected," she said to her husband in the train, when they were crossing the solitary plains by the Solway side—a tract of country, by the way, especially calculated to depress the bravest young bride.

"What, with *me*, duckie darling?" asked the devoted Mac. "Surely *I* can take care of you!"

"You!" exclaimed Jessie, flashing her bright eyes upon him. "You! Why, you are one of them! You know you are!"

"Well, then, so are you. You are me, and I'm you, and all that sort of thing!"

"I know you won't back me up! I know you won't! How can you, against your own kith and kin? I know you'll go over to the enemy!"

"Enemy! Jessie, what nonsense! Enemy, indeed!"

"Yes, that's just like you! Of course, you'll never see the enemy; but I shall; and you won't back me up. How can you, when you'll never see how they try to put me down? They'll try to put me down—I know they will; but, mark you, I won't be put down by them; no, I won't be! Oh, I wish I were not three hundred miles away from Uncle John! Uncle John never let me be hurt! Uncle John would back me up against all the Mrs. Carrutherses in the world. I don't like people-in-law, Mac; I don't like them at all! I wish we weren't going to Muirhead. It's most inconsiderate of you to take me to Muirhead, to face them all alone; because I

don't consider you any one—not any one at all. In fact, you're worse than nobody, because you're one of them! I wish I had Alison to take care of me! You're no use!"

"Oh, but, I say, darling, don't you think that's a little rough on a fellow?" asked Mac, soothingly.

"Rough! No, indeed! You were awfully nice to me in Paris and in London, Mac; but now you're going over to your own people! I know you are—I can feel it! It's no good telling me you're not. I know you're as pleased as possible to be going to Muirhead!"

"Of course, I am! I like my people!" Mac threw at Jessie.

"I knew you did! I knew you did!" cried Jessie, quite viciously, showing Mac a good many of her little white teeth.

"They are a family any girl might be proud of marrying into," said Mac, very bluntly.

"There you are! That's just it! That's

the thing I'm always going to be made to feel! Oh, I'm so miserable! and, oh! I've no Alison to encourage me! Oh, if I only had Alison with me, I wouldn't mind!"

"Really, Jessie, I wonder you have the conscience to mention that poor girl's name, when, for the last week, you've been harrying the very life out of her!"

"Because I'm so mad that she isn't coming to Muirhead! Oh, with Alison I'd face all Birrendale, and all Scotland too, for the matter of that! I tell you what, Mac, if Alison were here, she wouldn't be staring stupidly out of the window, as you're doing; she'd be encouraging me. She'd be telling me how I was looking, and how——"

"Oh, well," said Mac, turning round and glancing at his wife, "you are sure to be the only good-looking woman within twenty miles of Muirhead. We're not strong in beauty; I'll admit that."

"A good-looking woman!" cried Jessie, throwing up her hands with horror.

"Have I come down to being 'a good-looking woman' already? Oh, Mac! You clumsy, clumsy, clumsy darling! You idiot, idiot darling!"

"Well," said Mac, seizing the two little hands in his own big paws, and kissing them fervently, "I suppose I must be an idiot, or I couldn't be so wildly anxious to show myself to my people in the character of an abject slave! Go it, Jessie; go it, darling; for the more you go it, the more I adore you, and—what is more to your purpose—the better you look!"

In spite, however, of her misgivings, young Mrs. Carruthers simply took Muirhead by storm; and not only Muirhead, but the whole of that country side. Carruthers of Muirhead took to her very kindly, furbishing many a rusty old joke or compliment on her behalf; and Mrs. Carruthers, who had fought against the engagement, in the first instance, welcomed the bride with a cordiality that seemed, at any rate, very like affection. "You've just a delightful

way, my dear, of taking people off my hand," she said to Jessie several times in the course of the next fortnight; and Jessie was extremely gratified by this tribute to her social qualities, perhaps the highest Mrs. Carruthers could give to any one.

"Ah, Mac, if you can't make yourself loved, make yourself valued! I'm happy to find that your silly little wife is valued, after all!" said Mrs. Jessie. "With a house full of people, Mrs. Carruthers is still able, thanks to me, to devote several hours a day to cutting out grey shirting. What can she desire more?"

Mac and Jessie had expected to find Alec still among the sedges, and the incident of the Prisoner's Walk weighed heavily on the mind of each. Alec, in his few brief notes to them, had said absolutely nothing about his disappointment; but, knowing his ways, they had been able to read between the lines, especially during their recent visit to Tower Hill. They were, therefore, rather astonished to find Alec as hard at

work as if he had been cramming for an examination. No longer did his own sitting-room present that tidyness that had so appalled his parents; Mac would come upon him there, all but snowed up in pamphlets and blue books. He was working up an interest in Alison's interests; he had little time to spare for anything else. By this time, he was quite certain that his failure with Alison was entirely due to himself. It was all his own fault. There he was right, although how easily he might have won neither he nor Alison then knew.

There are certain natures that develop very slowly. Alec, and, to some extent, Alison, belonged to this class. To these natures—often very beautiful ones when mature—the process of reaching maturity is accompanied by very great discomfort. There is a singular struggle between the inner life and the outer. The inner life grows rapidly vigorous; but instead of finding the outer life an obedient servant,

it feels it to be a strong, hard case, much too small for convenient habitation. The imprisonment within one's self that such natures undergo is very trying; but the unfortunate captive rarely meets with sympathy from others. Few people know of his solitary struggles to get free; the crust surrounding him is mistaken for himself, and such frantic efforts to break up his prison, as his fellow-creatures may perceive, are so often ungainly, and consequently treated with ridicule, that he does his very best to hide them, even from the most loving eyes. When such a being finds another being to whom he can talk with some little freedom, that being is inestimably precious to him. When Alec used to say—as before that time when he had watched the door of the Queen's House he used often to say—"Alison is the only girl I have ever been able to talk to," he had hailed her as the one who was, he hoped, to lead him into that liberty he so much coveted.

Now, if Alec had really talked to Alison freely a quarter as much as he fancied he talked, if he had, indeed, revealed to her the bondage in which he was held, he would have gained her entire sympathy at once. But even with Alison that was not possible. He only thought he talked. He only imagined he was telling her about himself. Poor fellow, he was so thoroughly possessed with what he called "a dumb devil," that when he uttered a couple of short sentences, he was so perfectly astonished at the performance, that he quite forgot to remember that it was not much to other people; and Alison had expressed exactly what she had too often felt, when she had exclaimed, "Oh, life with him would be one long yawn!" She had come, though, very near the truth when she had attributed his dulness and heaviness to mere "youngness." That was really what was the matter with Alec Carruthers.

Always ready to blame himself, Alec's reproaches, since he had found out how he

had neglected to cultivate Alison's likings, had never ceased. He had a great, although undeveloped, capacity for hard work, and an unconquerable tenacity of purpose, that Basil Penrose might, perhaps, equal, but could not surpass. He had determined to win Alison. He had failed to do so in one way; he intended to try another—many others. But it was very uphill work. He had two little notes in his letter-case; they were all he possessed of her handwriting. He cherished them devoutly, although they might well have filled him with despair. The first was in acknowledgment of that reckless, lavish gift of flowers, John Moss, the head gardener, never ceased to lament. "The Mission," it ran, "thanks Muirhead for the generous offering, which has given brightness to many a dull life."

"I deserve it!" said Alec penitently. "I deserve it! I'll send some more next Friday."

He had done so, posting, at the same time, a line or two to Alison, simply asking

if there were any other way in which he could help the Mission.

"Ah," said Alison, when she read it, "he should have thought of that before!" And she compared Alec and his tardy outburst of philanthrophy with Basil Penrose and his spontaneous offer of help to the little urchin whose toy had come to grief, very much to the disparagement of Alec. Again she gave away every scrap of blossom, without reserving the smallest bud for herself.

As Alec's note had been addressed to her, she felt obliged to answer it. She wrote:—

"DEAR MR. CARRUTHERS,

"Very many thanks for the flowers, which are appreciated by our poor people in the most touching way. Enclosed is the address of our superintendent, who will be very grateful for help in any form."

There was, it struck Alec, a most crushing finality about this last missive. "But

it serves me right," said he. "I deserve it. I'll just go on sending the flowers; and a little cheque can't do any harm. I suppose they always need funds. I must study up these things, and Old London, and the City, and all her other interests. I might just as well; for now she has gone, I haven't any interests of my own left." So he read and made notes, and made notes and read, several hours every day, and went on sending the flowers.

When Jessie first came to Muirhead, she dazzled Alec painfully; she was so bright. There was a dinner-party a few evenings after the arrival of the young couple. Alec was in the drawing-room when Jessie came in, wearing her wedding dress, and with a few white blossoms among the soft wreaths of her hair. It was really almost too dreadful for Alec. He recalled the wedding-day, and Alison as bridesmaid, too vividly; he slunk off into the conservatory, until the gong boomed through the house.

"Extraordinary fellow, that Alec," said Mac to his wife. "He'll sit with me, in the smoking-room, by the hour together of an evening, and never approach the subject. And to keep silence to me, too, when he must remember how I used to go on at him about you, in those dreadful days it doesn't do even to think about now! Taking all things into consideration, I do think he might speak out what's on his mind. Surely, he can't know about the other man! What a fool—begging your pardon—what a fool that Alison must be! The idea of her pitching over a fellow like Alec—the very best match in all Birrendale, bar none!"

"Match, indeed! Don't talk to me in that vulgar way! What do you suppose Alison cares for matches? Why, you don't know her at all, if you think it would make the smallest fraction of a fraction's difference to her if Balmoral were added to Birrendale. You don't know the stuff she's made of!" said Jessie.

"Alec has every advantage!" groaned Mac.

"Every advantage! And what can he have worse, I should like to know?" cried Jessie. "Do you suppose," she went on, clutching her husband by each of his broad shoulders—"do you suppose that any man can have a greater disadvantage than having every advantage? Now, can you imagine, in the wildest flight of your fancy, you prosaic old being, that *I*, for instance, would have married *you*, if you had possessed one scrap of advantage? Of course, I shouldn't! A man with every advantage hasn't a chance with any—well, with any girl that has any sort of spirit, or is worth calling a girl at all—not the ghost of a chance, my dear! I give you my solemn word, Mac, that if you hadn't have been the wretched beggar you were—that if you hadn't had every possible disadvantage a man can have, in mind, body, and estate—I'd never, never have married you. Never! you dear, foolish, old, old,"

etc. "And, of course, it's just the same with Alison. How can a girl care for a man who has so many advantages as Alec has? It isn't in human nature; of course, it isn't! I don't blame her, I'm sure!"

"Not blame her! When you've driven her nearly mad with your harrying!"

"Hoot! Toots! You don't know anything! I wasn't to encourage her infatuation with that inquisitor, was I?"

"But what I'm trying to come at," said Mac, with a sorely puzzled look, "is—do we want to marry them, or don't we?—Alison and Alec, I mean."

"We do! Take that for an answer! Alec has to be married; of course, he has to be. He can't be an old bachelor, like Uncle John. It's his duty to get married; and his duty he will do. And it's decidedly to our advantage to see he marries Alison, instead of one of the many Birrendalians, who would be only too willing to accept him, in spite of all his unfortunate advantages.

I haven't tackled Alec yet, myself; but as you have so signally failed, why, I shall take the earliest opportunity of doing so, that's all."

The opportunity was rather long in coming. At first Alec positively avoided Jessie; afterwards, she would look up suddenly, now and then, and find him standing silently near her. But she would smile encouragingly, and Alec would immediately vanish. Jessie was some days at Muirhead before any one so much as asked how Alison was. She resented the neglect as a slight to her family. At length, Jessie, catching sight one morning of Alec writing near his window, went boldly upstairs from the lawn, and putting her head in at the door of Alec's own sacred sitting-room, asked if Mac were there, although she knew well enough he was out fishing.

"No," said Alec, turning round. "He has gone out with my father."

"So you have taken to literature!"

exclaimed Jessie airily, as if quite taken by surprise. "You put me in mind of Alison, in Uncle John's den. I must come and look at what you are doing."

It was the first time Alec had heard Alison's name, with his outward ears, since he had left London. It gave him a shock, such as one feels on hearing, for the first time, the name of a dead friend—such a shock as Alison had felt when she opened the hamper of flowers from Muirhead, and thought of funeral wreaths.

Jessie knew what she had done; she saw the flush of pain, and the sudden straightening of the lips; but, without a pause, she crossed the room to the writing-table by the oriel.

"What! Philanthrophy?" she said gaily, taking up a Report. "Ah, that is one of Alison's hobbies." And she perched herself in the sill of the broad window, just where certain ends of ivy, wandering from the original old border tower, had reached the modern house that clustered

about it, and made a charming background for Jessie's head.

"One of her—her reasons for living," said Alec slowly, and with emphatic reverence, as if speaking of a departed saint, but avoiding Alison's name, which, at the moment, he felt it would kill him to pronounce.

"You are very much alike, you and she," said Jessie gravely, falling in with Alec's mood.

"If I could dare think so!" said Alec, still very slowly and emphatically.

"But you are, you know," put in Jessie very softly, yet with decision.

Alec shook his head mournfully, and turned away from Jessie. But Jessie, having conquered the initial difficulty of making an opening, was determined to go further. "There is, I mean, such a basis of seriousness in the character of each of you," she said.

Alec made no reply.

"What has happened while we were

away?" Jessie asked very softly, after waiting a few moments.

"I wish I knew," said Alec, miserably and vaguely.

"Have you had a quarrel?" said Jessie, still under her voice, but leaning forward eagerly.

"I suppose she would say I had no right to have a quarrel with her."

"Then you have had a quarrel?"

"I must not call it just that," said Alec, as if painfully groping about for a term he could not find. Then turning a little to Jessie, he asked sadly, "Did she speak to you of me?"

The answer that flashed through Jessie's mind was, "Yes; she told me that life with you would be one long yawn!" What she said, however, was, "Alison never hinted at a quarrel."

"Will she have kept any of the flowers I sent her for herself?" asked Alec, with a most troubled look, that was almost more than Jessie could stand.

"You sent them all to the Mission, you know," she said kindly.

"Ay!" said Alec; "I always do the wrong thing."

"Really, do you know," said Jessie, "I'm afraid you must have been doing so lately. Certainly, you and Alison were good friends until——"

"Until the day I met her on the Tower Green, after she had been to the Queen's House," Alec put in, hurriedly for him. "I suppose it would be my fault. I had been thinking so much of her; I had given no thought to things she liked. I tried to speak out then, although I felt I had better hold my tongue. It was foolish. I blundered, as usual. She would not let me speak. She meant it for kindness, I am sure. She was different that day. I don't know what happened. Only—does she not care for me at all?"

The scene on the Prisoner's Walk, Alison's bright eyes and tremulous colour, the many evidences, trifles in themselves,

of Basil Penrose's influence over her; all these rose up between Alec's plaintive question and Jessie's answer. She turned away from the pleasant room, so carefully got up in the latest Edinburgh edition of the last thing in London High Art, and from the young Scotsman, with the bent head, at his writing-table, to the broad, velvety lawns, and the great exotic trees out of doors. "Does she not care for me at all?" It was so terrible a question to settle; besides, in spite of the Prisoner's Walk, she could not positively tell whether or not there was a lurking affection for Alec still in her cousin's heart.

Alec shot a hasty glance at her averted face; the northern blue gleamed for an instant in his eyes, and then was lost again under his deep brows.

"Alec," said Jessie, turning round with decision, "you've been letting things drift. They mustn't drift; you must take them boldly in hand."

"I cannot force myself upon her!"

said Alec, also with decision, but with pride as well.

"Well, then, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I can wait; that is the only thing I can do well. I can endure the long agony of patience. It's what I've been used to all my life." He looked down sadly at the books and papers that covered his table. He took up a pamphlet, on the cover of which was an engraving of a starving family. "Does it seem mean and selfish of me to speak so in the presence of *this?*" he asked. "Ought I to sneer at myself for indulging a sentimental grief when such things exist? Can one do any good to these people by going among them? You used to work in her Mission; perhaps you know?"

"I don't know what good I may have done to other people," said Jessie; "but—it was after poor Mac's dreadful accident, you know—if I hadn't gone among those people then, how could I have lived?" Jessie put the question with a wistful

pathos, so direct from the heart, that Alec could not help responding—

"Ay, how could you have lived? Look, that's the way in which I've been treating these things!" he went on bitterly, taking the crumpled Report out of one of the table drawers.

"Ah, well, never mind," said Jessie, brightening. "As soon as Alison comes back, just go to her and confess your wickedness. She'll forgive you. Go and see her, and have a long, long talk with her, and tell her everything that's in your heart. I'll let you know when she is at home again. Then you must go. She is worth the winning, and you must win her. Good-bye for the present, Alec."

Jessie smiled her gentlest smile as she rose from the window-seat. She stepped lightly over the conventional lotus flowers of the carpet, and so out of the room. Just as she was going downstairs to look for Mac, Mrs. Carruthers came out of her sanctum.

"I was seeking you, my dear," she said, as Jessie ran down quickly to her. "I have just had a note from Lady Birrendale. She needs our drawing-room for a meeting next week. It is for Colonel Maxwell—Lord Birrendale's brother, you will remember—who is to speak; and Miss Penrose, who is staying with them just now, is to sing. Come and help me make a list of the people we must ask."

"Miss Penrose!" exclaimed Jessie.

"You will have heard of her?" asked Mrs. Carruthers. "She has been much written about in the papers lately."

"Have you seen her? What is she like?" asked Jessie, leaving Mrs. Carruthers' question unanswered.

"She is just the most beautiful creature I have ever seen!" said Mrs. Carruthers with fervour.

"Then I'll come and help you with the list," said Jessie, as soon as she had mentally exclaimed: "Thank you, Mrs. Carruthers!" 'The most beautiful creature I have ever seen' indeed!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE FAST DAY.

A FEW days after Jessie's talk with Mac, the Birrendale Fast came round. It was, and is still, kept on the Thursday before the Sacrament Sunday; and if it is possible for any day to be more profoundly Sabbatic than the Scotch Sabbath, the Sacramental Fast is that day in Birrendale.

The Fast Day of the year of Alec's rejection was a very perfect one—a fine summer day in Scotland; one can say no more. The wide stretches of border country which Muirhead commanded were, on that bright, peaceful morning, too sweet for words to paint; they formed a landscape to make one's heart cry for very joy and tenderness.

It was the landscape Alison Bayliss had once lingered over so fondly, before she came to London ; when, as it seemed to her, she had embraced it with the passionate grief of parting, and had felt, "I cannot leave you, Birrendale!" That was before she had learned to love London.

The dark woods of Muirhead rose somewhat abruptly above the broad moors, now purple with blooming heather. Here and there the rapid Birren, rushing to meet its Solway, glanced like silver through the bright green open spaces below the house. Beyond the purple moors were great waves of hills and dales, as if a tumbling sea, at the divine word, "Peace, be still!" had, without losing their forms, become solid earth and fertile fields; stretching away, away, far as eye could see, growing dimmer and dimmer, until earth and sky were gently one. But on the west the lovely land gave place to the far off, lovelier ocean, to the wide Solway Firth, guarded by English Skiddaw and all his hills, and to a broken

coast-line, running from Cumberland to the very foot of great Crifel, in the distant Stewardry of Kirkcudbright.

"Mother," said Alec, looking along the dove-coloured sea, as he and his parents stood on the roof of their old tower, early on the Fast Day, "there's no cap on Crifel. I think I'll just walk over to Allarbie this forenoon. Mr. Baird of Kirkhope is to preach; and Donald Bell says he's 'a gran' preacher the noo!'"

It was five miles to Allarbie. It was the long walk alone that Alec coveted; he knew his parents would never leave the little whitewashed church, among the rows of whitewashed cottages, that clustered under the shadow of Muirhead, just on the edge of the moors.

"Well, my dear, it's just a lovely day!" returned his mother blandly.

So, without more words on the subject, Alec, in due time, set out for the church in the little town. As he neared Allarbie and was within sound of its one loud bell, he

perceived by the unusual number of staid, decently dressed country bodies who were stolidly nearing it, in that leisurely, never-to-be-hurried way of theirs, that somehow covers so much ground so quickly, that he was likely to make one of a large congregation. On his walk, he passed many posters on which were the names of Colonel Maxwell and Miss Penrose. In the lobby—where two elders were guarding a pewter alms plate, which rested on a three-legged stool, or tripod—Alec's own shilling fell among quite a multitude of coppers. By the time the Reverend Andrew Baird, in his black Genevan gown, ascended the pulpit, the church was quite full.

The interior of the church was plain enough; it was very much like an old-fashioned London chapel. There was a deep gallery in which, immediately facing the pulpit, was the provost's state pew, where the provost and his family sat, under a painted deal canopy, supported by slight Corinthian columns to match.

The service at Allarbie was comparatively untouched by modern innovations. No organ tones softened the harshness of the local voice, no stained glass harmonized the hard colouring of the local millinery and dress-making. "The Scottish Hymnal," that beautiful northern "Ancient and Modern," was not yet permitted there. The people still stood to prayer, and sat while they sang those rugged old Psalms to which they clung so fondly. Before the sermon, the preacher gave notice of the meetings that Colonel Maxwell and Miss Penrose were to hold. Few English people would have cared for the Allarbie service; they might also have thought, from that grave stolidity—which looked almost like indifference—in most of the congregation, that they themselves did not much care for it either—at least, not until the sermon was half over. But in a Scotch congregation, low as the fire may moulder, the fire is always there; it never quite goes out. One who knows them well may

see it sometimes gradually brightening all over the place, and may feel how little is needed to stir the latent heat to a vehement flame.

The Allarbie congregation was in a peculiarly sensitive state on that Sacramental Fast Day. Alec, a true Scottish borderer, to the finest fibre of him, was soon aware, in spite of the pressure of that never-ceasing personal distress of his, that the spiritual air was highly charged with religious emotion. He was aware of it; but in a misty, indefinite way, being, in fact, too preoccupied with his own affairs to give much heed to it. Presently, one hard-featured farmer took out his snuff box, and passed it to another hard-featured farmer sitting next him. The women in the smart bonnets fixed their eyes on the preacher; all over the church there were indications of feelings deeply stirred, but rigidly under control. When Alec stood up for the last prayer, he could but notice that there was none of the usual shuffling of

feet to break the intense and solemn silence. He himself had hardly followed the service; he could not be sure what the text was; but as the prayer was ended, and, after a slight but impressive pause, the preacher stretched his arms, with their wide black sleeves, at full-length, right out of the pulpit, and spread out his hands over his flock, as he gave them the parting blessing, Alec, with the whole congregation, bowed his head, and felt a wave of religious emotion tremble through the place.

A minute afterwards, the church was nearly empty. Alec joined the general stampede, and went out at once; spoke to the half-dozen people he knew, answered all inquiries about his own and his parents' health, walked quickly through the high street of the little town, and was soon on the silent country road, with his face towards the hills and Muirhead. The whole land was sacred to Alec. When he lifted his deep-set eyes to the still

ranges of hills, over whose sunlit brows the shadow of—

"The flying cloud that scuds across the blue"

was hurrying, he felt instinctively then, as he had done from his earliest childhood, that the blood of martyrs had dyed the hill-side bracken, that the psalms and prayers of his own covenanting ancestors had ascended from those solitudes. He did not *think* of it; but he had *felt* all his life —and especially on that solemn Fast Day— that all Birrendale was consecrated ground to him. The "Old Mortality" feeling was as much a part of his nature, as the love of London was of John Harbuckle's.

"How often I used to think," he said to himself, as he went along with the swinging step that covers so much ground, peculiar to those who are accustomed to long country roads—"how often, when I have looked at those hills, and thought of our fathers, have I said to myself there was no chance for me! I used to be just haunted by that rich

young man in the Gospels, and those words about 'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.' That's gone. There's one consolation left me; I'm poor enough now, having lost all that is of any value to me. I suppose I ought to find some comfort in that thought; but I don't. Having lost all I care for in this world, I don't find the Kingdom of Heaven a wee bit nearer! All I see before me is one bare, hard road of duty—nothing but duty from now until the end of my life—'duty without love'—unless——"

He had gone, perhaps, a mile beyond the little town, growing more and more depressed at each step, when, suddenly, a hand was laid with strong, kindly emphasis on his shoulder, and a manly voice, firm, but infinitely tender, said—

"Brother!"

He turned quickly, and looked round as if half-dazed; so suddenly had his mind been recalled from its wanderings. Recognizing the speaker, he coloured, feeling

that he had been watched in church, and the secrets of his heart explored there by a practised eye.

"Oh, Colonel Maxwell, how are you?" he stammered vaguely, putting out his hand.

"Well, thanks! You'll be walking back to Muirhead? I'll go with you as far as Cleugh-gill." And, linking his arm within Alec's, he fell into his pace.

Alec would have liked to rush away and hide himself in the darkest recesses of the woods they were passing.

"What a most glorious change has come over Andrew Baird!" exclaimed the colonel, after they had taken a few steps in silence.

Colonel Maxwell, of the Scots Guards, was every inch a soldier—tall, straight, square-shouldered, with a firmly set head, a strong, clear-cut face, that still showed signs of having been bronzed by long exposure to tropical suns, an iron-grey moustache of the regulation type, and close-

cropped, iron-grey hair, brushed straight back from his thoughtful temples, and dark grey eyes, in which an intense enthusiasm was burning.

"The people seemed more attentive than usual, I thought," returned Alec.

"I saw it! I can tell the moment when the change came!" continued the colonel. "The last time I was here, I talked to Baird; but his mind was full of nothing but modern criticisms. I could make no impression upon him; none at all! The next time I saw him, he was listening to the old Gospel, with the tears streaming down his face! To-day, we have seen the result."

"What result?" asked Alec uneasily.

"Life—spiritual life! I have just had a most interesting conversation with one dear young fellow," said the colonel. "I am expecting a glorious harvest next week."

"Ah, you are coming to us then," said Alec. "My mother has sent out a great

number of invitations, and nearly every one has been accepted."

"And you will be there?" said Colonel Maxwell, with a peculiarly anxious emphasis on the "you."

"I—I—hope so," said Alec, hesitating a little.

"Come! come! do come!" said the colonel with entreaty, and a slight pressure on the young man's arm. Then he paused, as if praying, inwardly, for direction. "You looked so sad in church," said he presently.

"I am sad," replied Alec with dreary directness.

"Are you seeking?" asked the colonel, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

Alec understood his companion's meaning, but his voice suddenly failed him; it was impossible for him to reply.

"You seemed so heavy-hearted as you were walking along the road alone," the colonel went on, after a few moments' silence. "It was painful to me to see you treading this happy earth, under these

rejoicing skies, so sadly, in these glorious days of the fulness of blessing."

"Would you rejoice if the light of your life had gone out?" asked Alec, with a pathetic clearness.

"It could not! The Lamb is the Light thereof!" said the soldier, with a triumphant ring in the voice, as he lifted his grand face to the everlasting hills. "Our son—our only son, the only child we ever had—fell at Tel-el-Kebir," he went on, his voice softening. "You are an only child, yourself. I need not tell you what his mother and I felt; but through it all we were able to rejoice—we *did* rejoice. Why not?

> 'He never takes away our all;
> Himself He gives us still!'"

"I just don't understand it," sighed Alec.

Whereupon, the colonel took him in hand so firmly, that before long, Alec had told him everything that was pressing on his heart—told him what he had not been able

to confide to his parents nor to Jessie; and the colonel treated him with a sort of motherly affection, that was irresistibly winning, going with him long past Cleugh-gill—Lord Birrendale's place—and nearly to Muirhead.

Colonel Maxwell was Lord Birrendale's brother. He was about to hold a week's Mission at Allarbie, and another week's Mission at Kirkhope; previous to which, he was having a series of drawing-room meetings, in different country houses.

When directly personal conversation was waning, Colonel Maxwell spoke of one or two incidents that had occurred at some of these meetings.

"Fortunately," he said, "I have found a most devoted helper, within the last few months. She is a very dear girl—a girl with a rather singular history. I have often met her before, at my brother's; but it is only quite lately that my wife has been able to induce her to devote her beautiful voice entirely to the Master's

service. She is coming over with us to-morrow. She will sing every evening during our special services."

"I heard her spoken of, I think, the other day; they said she was pretty," observed Alec gravely.

The colonel smiled. "Not pretty, in the least; she is beautiful," he said. "Her name is Mariora Penrose," he went on seriously. "Her father is a Suffolk rector —a very unawakened man, I am afraid, who has but little sympathy with his daughter's work. Indeed, he will not allow her to attend meetings in his parish. Her mother —but that is quite a romantic story." And he told Alec about the young Englishmen buying the girls in the slave-market. It was the same story Basil had told Alison on the Prisoner's Walk. "It was a plucky thing to do—wasn't it? My good little devoted helper is their daughter. She has naturally a strong wish to join some of our Levantine Missions; in fact, if my wife had not succeeded in getting her to use her

voice at our meetings, she would probably be now on her way to Greece. I can't help hoping, however, that she may be led to permanent work at home. But that must be left. She is with us now; and I am thankful for her help. Her simple little songs touch hearts that my words can't reach. She is a dear girl, entirely devoted to the Master; one of the most earnest Christian workers I have ever seen. You may imagine I've seen a good many. My wife is very fond of her; she is almost like a daughter to us now. I hope she will be able to sing at Muirhead. You will come to the meeting—won't you?"

"Yes, I will be there," said Alec very gravely, and with a sort of shrinking dread of having to meet so many people to whom he would, before and after the service, have to talk and be polite.

"I must be getting back to Cleugh-gill," said the colonel, stopping short.

Alec stopped too. A skylark, overhead, alone broke the bright stillness of the

purple moor when the steps of the two men ceased. The colonel turned his face heavenward with an ecstatic smile, and looked at the bird. Alec gazed at him in vague wonder.

"Beautiful type of the reconciled spirit, singing so happily as it mounts!" said the colonel, still looking up at the bird. "A day or two ago," he went on, glancing down at his companion, "I came upon a most wonderful, a most marvellous bit of Oliver Cromwell's experience. It's about the grandest thing I've ever read; perfectly unrivalled! 'I can say this of Naseby,' he writes, 'that when I saw the king's army draw up and march in gallant order, and we, a company of poor ignorant men, to seek how to order our battle, the General having commanded me to order all the horse, I could not—riding alone about my business—but smile out to God in praises, in assurance of victory. *And God did it!*' And God did it!" repeated the colonel, pealing out the exultant words,

with infinite height of triumph, and depth of tenderness, into the clear moorland air. "And God will do it again! I feel the assurance of victory! Oh, my dear fellow, when a man, intensely conscious of his absolute inability to cope with the overwhelming difficulties of his position, can so smile out praises to God—" and again the grand, weather-bronzed face turned upwards, while a rapturous love tenderly bent the firm lips—"then—then he knows that all things are possible to him that believes; then comes the assurance of victory; then 'And God did it!' is certain—certain as that you and I are standing here! May you find it so, Carruthers! God bless you! I shall pray for you. Remember, I shall expect to see you to-morrow."

He pressed his hand firmly on Alec's arm; Alec, the while, gazing out at him intently from under his deep brows.

"Thanks. You are very kind to take so much interest in me," he said; but in

his heart he added, "I just don't care to be prayed for."

Colonel Maxwell turned to retrace his steps across the moor. Alec stood still and looked after him, in the strangest confusion, as he watched the tall figure getting over the ground, and heard the well-known tune and words of—

> "'This is the victory, this is the victory,
> This is the victory,' we sing by the way,"

mingling with the skylark's song and the rustling of the summer wind through the heather. "The victory,"—could it mean, thought Alec, that, at last, he was to win Alison? "No!" he said, "victory never means with those people that we are to have our wishes. It generally means we are to give up all we care for in this world. But I am not going to give up Alison. I'll go and see her as soon as she returns. I shall understand her better then."

CHAPTER X.

NONA ADAIR.

THERE was a gentle stir of preparation at Muirhead all the morning preceding Colonel Maxwell's meeting: an arranging of many chairs and sofas in the drawing-room, the spreading of a longer table than usual for a large luncheon party, and Mrs. Carruthers, with Jessie and a couple of ladies who were staying in the house, hard at work filling innumerable Indian bowls and Dunmore vases with great masses of roses. Mrs. Carruthers loved a profusion of flowers; it was, indeed, the only profusion she tolerated; for luxury was an abomination to her, and the lavishing of a farthing an unpardonable sin.

The house that clustered round the

tower of Muirhead was very charming on that breezy morning, so wide, so light, so full of air and sunshine were the great rooms, the broad staircases, the long corridors; all in such perfect order, yet so home-like and instinct with the subtle charm of a domesticity, refined indeed, yet simple and strong. But on this morning, both Carruthers of Muirhead and his wife showed signs of preoccupation, if not of actual anxiety. The great shaggy head was constantly appearing at the door of any room in which its wife happened to be, and she would be called out mysteriously if any one else were there, and there would be a quiet little conference for a couple of minutes, and Carruthers would disappear (but he would be back again very soon), until Alec happened to come down, and actually volunteered to go out with his father. Carruthers liked to have his son about with him; not that he ever let Alec do anything on the estate, because he did all the superintending himself, so very

thoroughly that there was nothing left for any one else to do. What he required of his son was constant praise and backing up for everything he did, whether right or wrong. He liked his son to stand beside him and listen as he launched out against the gardeners, farm hands, or stablemen, when they displeased him, or to his enthusiastic laudation of these same when, as occasionally happened, they pleased him. There was really not much scope for Alec, because his father, with the kindest intention possible, appropriated every interesting occupation, both out of doors and in the house. He was a great absorber of vitality, was Carruthers of Muirhead.

The subject which agitated Carruthers and his wife on this occasion they expressed in the words, "Nona Adair." On the day when Alec had made the raid on the conservatories, Mrs. Carruthers had driven over to Hitherbie, and her husband had followed her. Hitherbie was a place nearly as large as Muirhead, from which

it was distant about eight miles. Miss Nona Adair was the owner of Hitherbie, and with the exception of the elderly aunt who lived with her, she had not a relative in the world. She was, it is true, a few years older than Alec, whom she had known all her life, and for whom she had never shown any particular liking; but everybody in Birrendale said that Nona Adair ought to marry Alec Carruthers. Carruthers of Muirhead himself was most distinctly of that opinion. The way in which Miss Adair managed Hitherbie filled him with the profoundest admiration.

Mrs. Carruthers had done her best to induce Miss Adair to come and stay a few days at Muirhead, but Miss Adair's many engagements had hitherto prevented her driving over there for more than a passing call. To-day, she was coming to luncheon, and was going to stay to the meeting; and, what was more, had required no pressing, much to the surprise of Mrs. Carruthers. Nothing was said to Alec about this prob-

able visitor, for Mrs. Carruthers thought it just possible that Alec might take himself off for the day if he heard that Nona Adair was expected.

Alec stuck nobly to his duty and his father all through the morning, but felt a kind of envy, now and then, of those young men of his acquaintance who were away from home, cramming for the army, navy, or civil service, or, who having safely passed these ordeals, were now engaged in fighting their own way in their respective professions. He also felt a dislike and a shrinking from the party, not at all peculiar to himself; because it frequently happened in that county, that when a great lunch was impending, such young men of the Birrendale families who happened to be at home, would be away, either for a day's fishing in a distant stream, or be obliged to go to Carlisle or Glasgow on business, or would have a sick friend, twenty miles off, whom they were obliged to visit at once. In fact, and taken as

a whole, the young men of Birrendale were rather conspicuous for their absence on most occasions. But that made it all the harder for one with so strong a sense of domestic duty as Alec Carruthers, who, it must be confessed, had a certain suspicion that what with the lunch, and what with his promise to Colonel Maxwell, he had been rather "let in for it" this time. But this became more than a suspicion very soon after the lodge gates had been thrown wide open, and the grey Solway shingle of the drive had been well disturbed by the wheels of several carriages.

It was just as a landau was setting down its freight before the sunny steps, and a canary-coloured old family coach was retiring with extreme dignity to the stables, that Alec Carruthers, with something nearly resembling an imprecation, exclaimed that "he was, indeed, in for it." Just coming into sight, behind the gigantic foreign trees that were the special delight and pride of their owner, there appeared an extra

tall mail phaeton, on which, perched high aloft, Alec perceived, with dismay, the form—so well-known all around that country side—of Miss Nona Adair. However, as he had determined to do his duty, he went and did it manfully. He set off from the house, and was soon within speaking distance of the mail phaeton.

"Here, jump up! I'll take the horses round to the stable myself," shouted Miss Adair, pulling up with a couple of the strongest hands owned by any woman in that part of the world.

"Thanks, I'll walk," said Alec.

"Then I shall have to crawl, and that's not at all my pace and form. Jump up!"

So he jumped up. She touched her horses, and away they flew round to the stable-yard, where she brought them up suddenly, with almost the sharpness and precision of an automatic railway brake. Then she alighted, disdaining any one's assistance; patted her horses, talked to

them, talked about them, inquired after all the inmates of the Muirhead stables, and gave a vivid account of the alarming illness of one of her own horses to quite a small crowd. She had a fine, hard, handsome face, had Nona Adair, a good large mouth, furnished with large, sound, white teeth, a strong, well-knit figure, rather over the middle height; she wore a close-fitting dark cloth jacket—cut like a man's coat about the throat—which was furnished with a manly collar, and a cravat, with a gold horseshoe pin in it; on her head was a hard bowler hat, innocent of weak, feminine trimmings, and a hard, tight knot of hard brown hair just under it. She had round eyes; not bold, but hard and shining, like polished stone.

"I hardly expected you would come," said Alec as—the horses having, at last, been sufficiently seen to—he turned with her towards the house.

"Well, it's a sort of entertainment that isn't much in my line," said Miss Adair.

"But I had a bet or two on, and so I had to come, you see."

"Yes? What are you betting on?"

"On the girl, 'the little dark hoss in the corner,' as we call her. Have you seen her yet?"

"Pleasure to come!" murmured Alec. "I should hardly think she was a fit and proper subject for betting upon, from all I've heard."

"Oh, nothing's amiss that way to the truly educated mind! It's surprising what one can bet on, if one only puts one's self to it!"

"Well, what's on now?" asked Alec, as if the subject had not the slightest interest to him.

"Just you never mind! You won't be told, so it's no use your asking," returned Nona Adair.

"Then I know my fate," observed Alec calmly.

"Then you know more than any one else does, that's all. However, I don't believe it!"

"Don't believe what?" asked Alec, nettled, the fierce glare that can make the colour of dark blue eyes look so bright coming into his.

"Why, that you know your fate!"

Alec wished he did. "H'm! I meant I knew you wouldn't tell me what your bets were on," he said hurriedly, completely driven out of his usual sing-song.

"There you are, with your native literalism!" exclaimed Nona Adair derisively. "So you've been falling in love," she added, after a very brief pause.

"Not with you, thank heaven!" It was all he could do to keep back the retort. He bit his lips, and felt anger and confusion reddening his face to the hue of a poppy; but he just managed to soften the words to—"It would do you no harm if you'd try the same yourself."

"Ha! ha! Then you admit the charge?"

Alec was silent for an instant; then, relapsing into his usual tone, he said, "Is

that your bet? If so, you have come to the wrong person for the straight tip."

These two, who had known each other all their lives, did not feel bound to be over-polite to each other; and as for Nona, she would have spoken her mind to any one quite freely.

"Well, I've seen the girl," she said.

"Which?" demanded Alec abruptly.

"'The little dark hoss in the corner'—Mariora Penrose. I've a bet on her. Shouldn't have come if I had not. So you have not seen her?"

"Pleasure to come, I just told you."

"There, never mind! When do you think the opera will be over?"

"What do you mean?"

"This afternoon's entertainment."

"About five o'clock."

"Two hours of it! I was rash to come."

"That's what I thought when I saw you. But you'll survive it. It wouldn't be a trifle that would kill you. There's the gong."

"Sit next to me at lunch. Don't let me fall a prey to a fossil or a fanatic. I shall break out wildly if you do, and scandalize all Birrendale. I feel I shall do or say something atrocious before I get home."

"Well, you've made a pretty fair start, already," remarked Alec, as they went up the steps beside the old tower, where the fresh young ivy leaves were glistening in the sun.

Nona Adair had just one redeeming quality in Alec's eyes. He could be as rude as he liked to her, without absolutely losing his self-respect. She was the only woman he was ever rude to; but there was such a thoroughly hard look about her, as if nothing could hurt her, that he could not help trying. He took her in to lunch as she had commanded. She talked about horses and the local races nearly all the time. He contradicted her flatly, whenever he got the chance, in his slow, sing-song, that he could, when he chose,

make sufficiently annoying; but he felt, after a time, that he might as well try to sting a piece of wood. She, however, managed to work him up to a perfect rage; which was, perhaps, the best thing that could have happened to him; it seemed to set all his faculties at liberty.

"Brute of a woman!" he exclaimed, rushing out of the house as soon as he could escape, and hurrying off to hide himself in a plantation of larches. "Brute of a woman! Imagine Alison talking to any man like that! How I hate the sight of that woman! Why was I such a fool as to promise Maxwell to be at the meeting? I can't be civil to that woman! I hate her! I hate her! I hate her!"

Jessie sat opposite Alec and Nona Adair, and felt much cheered by what she witnessed. She and Mac had several things to say to each other, later on; and, presently, Mac was sent out to look for Alec, and bring him back.

"Are they going to make a neat, wee

collection of our crumbs for poor old Lazarus?" asked the unabashed Miss Adair of the ancient lady who came over in the canary-coloured coach, as she took her place in the drawing-room beside her.

"It will be just about Dives himself, to-day; he's been far too much neglected, lately," returned the old lady shrewdly. "*And so have his daughters*," she added pointedly.

"Well, the Colonel is a bold man to attack him in his own diggings!" said Nona Adair.

"Ay! he is that. Like Knox, he fears the face of no man, nor woman either."

"And three o'clock is such an abominably secular time of day!" went on Nona Adair.

"To worldly people. But here is the Birrendale party."

"A congregation in themselves. And they've caught the unfortunate Alec alive, and are making him trot about with the little hymn-books! I feel that poor wretch's

doom is sealed, *chose sure!* Ah, there's the girl!"

"My dear, this is a solemn occasion!" said the ancient dame reprovingly.

"For solemn folks," retorted Nona Adair. "But then, you know, we really *do* look after Lazarus, don't we? Why, we are always after him! Even I—heathen as I am—I am always after him! He gets all the crumbs I'm not robbed of."

CHAPTER XI.

MARIORA.

Colonel Maxwell must have been a brave man; otherwise, he could not have stood up in the Muirhead drawing-room, and preached as he did to that goodly company of admirable ladies and gentlemen—not about the British Lazarus, or the Hindoo Pagan, or the barbarous African, but about their own souls. It was a hard task he set himself, in that large, beautiful room, odorous with roses, fresh with summer breezes, and which yet escaped the charge of being actually luxurious. The people, too, were like the room. They were most of them clothed in purple and fine linen of the most fashionable cut. They fared sumptuously every day; they had the best

of everything this world can give, and yet managed to steer clear of enervating lavishness. There was plenty of exercise and fresh air in their daily lives, and the comfortable assurance that the crumbs that fell from their tables were duly collected, and forwarded to the proper quarter. If they asked, "What lack we?" there were many excellent reasons why they should feel a wonder that anything more was expected of them. But the colonel was equal to the occasion, although probably, it would have been easier for him to have preached in a thieves' kitchen. He preached with just the same ecstatic enthusiasm with which he had spoken to Alec out on the moors, and with an earnestness and reality that now and then drove back the light from his eyes, and left them blank, and the blood from his cheeks, and left them pale.

The decorous silence grew profound. Alec, the heir of the house, and perhaps the only one present who was just then

really conscious of a desperate poverty of heart, was intensely moved. He bowed his head; he felt as if he could never raise it again. He did not raise it until, the preaching being ended, he heard the colonel say—

"Our dear friend, Miss Penrose, has kindly promised to sing to us. Perhaps she will do so now?"

Then Alec Carruthers raised his head, and, looking out from those eyes of his, that were set so far back in his head, saw a girl move to the keyboard of the grand piano. She stood quite still for an instant, struck a chord, and gazed across the instrument towards the assembly with most pathetic intentness. Her face was beautiful with a beauty such as Alec had never before so much as believed could still exist in a being living in this prosaic age; but at that moment, he never gave its beauty a thought, although he felt its power. It was an exquisite little face, crowned and overshadowed by soft dark

hair, rippling in innumerable wavelets. The drawing of its contour, of the delicate temples, the modelling of the smooth, clear cheeks, were wonderful in themselves, and its beauty patent, even to the untaught eye. There was a most extraordinary pathos in every gentle curve, that went straight even to the heart of Nona Adair. Under the beautiful level brows, there were two almond-shaped eyes. Those eyes were always—

"Homes of silent prayer."

But now, there was in them an expression of unutterably tender yearning, that was increased by a certain tension of the nerves and muscles, infinitely touching. She had a spare little figure, clothed very simply, in brown, with one deep-red carnation near her throat. She gazed for an instant or two at the assembly. The hush of expectancy fell on all the company. They waited for her to sing. The rigid tension of her mouth relaxed, there was a slight quiver in each corner of the sweet lips;

they parted; but, instead of singing, she spoke, as if impelled by some irresistible emotion or inspiration. She said,

"I am going to sing number two hundred and ninety-three: 'She only touched the hem of His garment;'—and"—she paused—"oh, if there should be a dear unsaved one here, I pray that while we are singing the little chorus—

"'Oh, touch the hem of His garment,'

that one may be enabled to do so then."

She struck the chord again, and began the hymn with an inexpressibly clear, heartfelt tone in each beautiful round note. A little picture rose before Alec's eyes as Mariora sang the simple narrative: the Eastern crowd under the Syrian sky; the Saviour, so Divine, so human; the trembling woman, who only touched the hem of His garment. And then came the personal appeal—

"Oh, touch the hem of His garment,
And *thou too*——"

With the words, Mariora's gaze, which had during the narrative seemed far away in Palestine, changed; it grew full of a strange magnetic power; she felt, she afterwards said, as if she were drawing the people to the Saviour's touch; she saw trembling souls stretching out feeble hands. And then her eyes, which, hitherto, had seen no individual, but only the company as a whole, fell on Alec's rapt face; and, "steadfastly beholding him, she perceived that he had faith to be healed." She gave that personal appeal with even more urgent entreaty after the second verse, all the while "steadfastly beholding" Alec with those wonderful eyes of hers, and drawing him—drawing him, each instant, with increasing power. But would it come really to the touching point? How many had she drawn so near, so very near, and yet—yet they had never touched? the contact—the saving contact, had never been effected! She was strung up to the utmost

tension when she sang that appeal for the last time :—

"Oh, touch the hem of His garment,
And thou too shalt be free;
His saving power this *very hour*
Shall give new life to *thee*."

And Alec did as she told him. Mariora saw him do it. She smiled a strange, spent smile, as she took her place again, and shaded her face with her cold little quivering hands.

CHAPTER XII.

"NOR I."

"YES, Alison, this is still incomparably the finest square in Europe," said John Harbuckle to his niece, as they stood together, by one of the windows of the house on Tower Hill, the morning after their return from Belgium. "I'll go out and see how the new street is getting on, before I settle down to business. I hope you are glad to be in London again, my dear," he added, after a slight pause.

Guileless being! For the moment, he quite forgot the reason of their trip. All he thought of was Alison's sympathy with him in his hobby.

Alison was looking at Basil Penrose's

turret. "Indeed, indeed, I am!" she exclaimed warmly. "I think the City is charming in August, when the masters are away, and the other people at play. Find out what has been done during our absence, Uncle John, and we'll go out together this evening, and you shall show me the sights."

So Uncle John went out, and prowled among the navvies and builders, to his heart's content, before he returned to his day's work in the office.

As for Alison, she hurried away as soon as she could up to her den and her novel. How eager she was to see it again, to begin again to work for Basil's work! She pulled open the drawer where she kept her MS. On the very first page she looked at were the stains of the tears that had fallen on it during that cruel week, when she had thought they were going to take her away to Belgium in uncertainty, not knowing whether Basil cared for her or not. She read those pages over; she liked them

very much; they were full of the tender melancholy and questioning of the days before the meeting on the leads of the Queen's House. But how should she go on with the story now all her own was so changed? Must her ideal girl change with herself? That ideal girl did change very much. During the long morning's work she grew more like Alison, and less like Jessie, for Alison had not yet attained the art of keeping her own daily life in due subordination to her book. At that time her own passing feelings ruled whatever she wrote, and everything was tinged with Alison and Basil. I am afraid her girl was, as she herself admitted, "rather wobbly." Basil did not know Alison had returned. How was she to let him know? All the people she visited at the Tower were away. Perhaps he would think it was about the time for her to be back, and call to see Uncle John. In the meanwhile, writing that novel made the mornings pass very quickly. It was ten o'clock, then

eleven directly, and half-an-hour afterwards, as it seemed, one was striking.

So the days went by, until Saturday brought Alec's hamper of flowers—which, during her absence, had been sent to the school-room—again to Trinity Square and Alison. This time she did not even unfasten the hamper. "It makes me too sad," she said. "How I wish I had never seen Alec, or that he had never cared for me! I just can't bear to touch those flowers!" And she did not. Uncle John took them to the school-room, and other hands than Alison's arranged them and gave them away. But that afternoon she soon recovered from her depression, and grew very happy as she went from room to room in the great Peabody blocks. Every one was so glad to see her again; every one had such kind words of welcome; all so delighted to hear where she had been. "How good they all are to me!" she said in her heart, over and over again, feeling almost overwhelmed with gratitude.

"I do believe they love me! I am so glad of it!"

Presently she thought she would go to the court where she had seen the dead baby for whom she had made the funeral wreath. She went, and spent some time there. The young woman with the tragical face was not there then, but the place brought her back to Alison's memory.

"Did you see her while I was away?" she asked, as again she was walking home with one of her fellow-workers.

"Yes; I have met her several times lately. She seems to have grown stranger than ever. She has fallen into a way of muttering to herself as she walks along, poor thing!"

"Poor thing!" echoed Alison pitifully. "I should like to know more of her."

"I'm afraid you would find she had a very sad story."

"She seemed so good and kind!" sighed Alison.

"I have come across her, trying to help

the poorest and the worst," said Alison's companion. "She is very brave or, very desperate, poor thing!"

"Both, perhaps," said Alison, and grew sad and quiet.

"Oh, 'the slain, the slain of the daughter of my people!' Why cannot I weep day and night for 'the slain of the daughter of my people?'" The words repeated themselves, over and over again, in her heart, with a melancholy, never-ending wail, like that bitter, unceasing cry of the Great City the heart of the true London lover can always hear through every other sound. A feeling of unutterable sadness came over Alison as she walked towards home, along the noisy, dingy streets,—for, as every true woman must, she dearly loved her own sex; and the womanhood of every woman was sacred to her, although how deeply sacred, she herself then hardly knew. She was secretly weeping, not with her eyes, but with her heart, and had, for once, quite forgotten the existence of Basil Penrose,

when she again reached the Minories—the ugly and nautical thoroughfare Alison had long ago made poetical to her own fancy, as "the Street of the Little Sisters;" the street where, in olden times, the Sorores Minores, or Poor Clares, had had their beautiful convent. Poor Alison, what an idealist she was! Even such prosaic facts as a railway bridge of atrocious hideousness, sailor's eating-houses, and outfitting shops, yellow with "sou'-westers," she could look at through a certain veil of poetry.

Just as Alison reached the end of the Minories, and was feeling very, very sad, she happened to see Basil Penrose himself, crossing the road from the opposite side. For an instant she saw him before he saw her. He was walking at his usual rapid pace, and looking even more self-engrossed than when she had first met him at the Queen's House; his intentness keener, his face thinner, his expression stern to cruelty. He looked angry and annoyed. Alison gave one little involuntary shiver, as she

had done that day at the Queen's House, when the sun was blazing above the river, and then—he saw her! In an instant, he and she were both transfigured. Alison's friend noticed it, and quietly withdrew. As for Basil, Alison saw him transfigured before her very eyes. There could be no possibility of mistake or illusion about it; Alison saw his whole expression change, saw it with her own suddenly beaming eyes. In the middle of the road they met; their hands touched.

"You have come back!" Basil exclaimed; and with all his masterfulness the delight in his voice was not to be compelled into steadiness. He led her carefully to the footpath; his bright glance, his protecting action, encircled her again, as with a caress of joy and fervour. "What centuries, what millenniums you've been away! How could you do it?" asked Basil.

"Only a little three weeks!" murmured Alison, suddenly all so aglow with happiness, that everything except his presence

was gone clean out of existence. The weeks had seemed long enough to her while she had been away; but now, in this fresh triumph of certainty, she—being, after all, but mortal woman—could not help just putting into the "little" the most delicious touch of—I suppose I mustn't say "coquetry" of Alison—a touch, then, of playfulness, that she could now afford herself, that sprang up spontaneously out of her sudden and boundless happiness of sureness and possession.

"'A little!' Accurate as I usually am, I couldn't measure the enormous length of it rightly," cried Basil. "Never go away from me again!"

They did not pause, though, those two; they walked on, side by side, in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, and turned into a dull side-street, running between tall warehouses, which they had nearly to themselves.

"But you weren't going this way," said Alison, still playing with her treasure.

"Is it possible you don't yet know that your way and mine are one? No, no! You are not so dense as that! Do you think that, after having waited for you all these ages, I can lose you for a moment longer? As it is, I shall never have time to tell you all I've been thinking about while you've been away; but it's been all you—always you." He turned sharply towards her; she knew, she could feel that his lips were actually quivering, she could hear the tremour in the words.

"Just now—were you thinking of—" she could not say "me,"—"of *that*—just now—before you saw me? I hope not," she said in a half-whisper, half-playfully still. "You looked so cross!"

"I was hating myself without you!" he returned passionately.

"Don't speak so; you frighten me!" And, indeed, she shivered again. "You make me think I must be deceiving you. I am not—not very good—nor—" and her trembling voice faltered and broke down.

How sweet she looked in that fair, tremulous humility of hers, through which her womanly pride of power, and her joy of conscious possession of his love shot and quivered with the pure radiance of an opal's flash!

"But you are! You are my soul, my heart, my conscience—all the qualities I never have had before, all I never dreamed I ever could have, all I never believed in, until I saw you!"

"Oh, no, no!" she cried. "It can't be so. How can it be?"

"It is! You have made an Englishman of me. I am English now, since I have loved my English Alison. And I do love you, dear!" he added more tenderly and simply. "I do love you; you are the only woman I have ever loved—ever even respected. I never believed in women until I believed in you."

Could any one have imagined that that face of his, which had looked so hard and worn and cruel, not five minutes ago,

could so soften and change with emotion? Alison knew how it softened, but she could not raise her eyes, as she walked on, without much perceptible slackening in her pace. She made no audible reply; her lips half-opened, but no word came.

"I am not a boy: I am twenty-nine," Basil went on hurriedly. "I do not say I have had no fancies; because I have been, in my time, both a boy and a fool. But now I am a man, and I have put away childish things; now I know what love means; now I know I have never loved any one but you. And you? Answer me —do, my darling! I have never loved any one before!"

"Nor I," she found voice enough to say, with a gravity quite her own. Then she paused and sighed, as if with relief, before she added, glancing up shyly, and smiling a little smile that might have turned any man's head, so sweet and naïve it was, putting an indescribably proud but tender emphasis on the pronoun, "And *I* have

had no fancies." So she gave him the assurance of her first pure maiden love.

"And *I* have had no fancies." As she spoke, as she gave Basil her troth, they passed that grey fragment of Old London Wall, that stands at the end of the little turning, at the corner of which was then the temporary "Tower of London" station. Once upon a time, she and Alec Carruthers had strolled round there together, to look at that fragment. That had been on a lovely summer evening, and Alison had admitted to herself that she had felt very happy then, as she and Alec had stood looking at the weather-beaten old wall from which, high up out reach, there had been growing one great tuft of grass, set with the long stalks of a small yellow flower. Often had Alison remembered how those minute blossoms stood out, each in its own glory, against the gentle evening sky; often had she felt that it was pleasant that Alec was with her then; but now she passed the wall and never so much as saw it. No

thought of him crossed her mind. If she had seen it, if it had reminded her of Alec, her words to Basil would have been the same, so certain she was, at that minute, that to no one else had her fancy really turned. And the bit of old wall said nothing. It put in no plea for Alec, it told no secret; it quietly went on waiting. Alison would have added that, as far as she was concerned, it had no secret to tell; she would have remained firm to her statement: "And *I* have had no fancies." She would not have called Alec "a fancy." He was Mac's cousin, that was all.

"Then you and I against the world!" exclaimed Basil triumphantly, as if flinging down a mailed glove in challenge to the universe, the moment the words had left Alison's lips.

"Yes," said Alison happily, proudly, firmly.

"Including Mrs. Bayliss," said Basil, as if finishing his challenge.

"She is my mother!" and Alison's voice trembled.

They had now arrived at the corner by the Trinity House. Basil made as though he would have gone on to Alison's home, in the opposite angle of the Square.

"Let us go and have it out with her at once!" said Basil.

"No, no!" cried Alison, laying her hands restrainingly on his arm. "You—you might hurt her! She mustn't be hurt!"

"She must be! It is inevitable!" and he moved a step forward on the broad, wide pavement. "No one must come between you and me."

"But not to-day! I must prepare her mind—I must. We must manage things a little. She must be considered. Let us go down Cooper's Row." And instead of turning towards her home, she led the way straight on.

"What have other people to do with us? Let us go and defy them all!" said Basil, as he turned away unwillingly.

"Ah! But this 'them' is mother and Uncle John; and I am very fond of them!"

"Then why did you make me think you had given me all your love?" exclaimed Basil fiercely.

"I have! I have!" replied Alison hurriedly.

"Yes, diluted with any amount of 'very fonds' for other people! Why did you answer 'Yes' so sweetly and firmly when I said 'you and I against the world'?"

"But my mother and my dear Uncle John are not 'the world'! said Alison.

"Bah! You don't know what love is; no woman does! I had thought that you alone, of all women in the world, did know; but you don't! You don't love me as I love you!"

They were safely hidden from Trinity Square by this time, and Cooper's Row was quite deserted, for it was Saturday afternoon.

Alison paused an instant. "Perhaps not," she whispered, "perhaps not." Her

breath came and went, she was hardly able to frame her words. "I can only give you as much as I have. I wish it were more, and — better—worth your having—" she paused for breath before she added, very gently and bashfully, but as if it was her right now to use the term —"dear!"

Basil was contrite in an instant, and in a torrent of fervent words told her how he valued the smallest fraction of her love—that it was so precious to him, he could not endure her to spare a thought for any one else.

They went round into the Minories, and then into the Tower Gardens, where they sat in one of the summer-houses overlooking the Moat, and forgot how the time was slipping by.

It was well for them that they were safely hidden there from the foot-passengers that passed to and fro over Tower Hill, for there presently came a woman along that path, a woman with rich tawny hair, and

a dead-white face, who muttered to herself as she hurried by. And all her muttering was of her false, false lover. Not pleasant words would these have been to meet the ears of a just-betrothed pair. If Alison and Basil had not turned into Cooper's Row when they did, they might have come face to face with that woman!

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM THE SALT TOWER.

"I MUST go, Basil; I must go!" cried Alison, springing up as the Tower bugles sounded, and the Tower clock struck. "I daren't stay another moment!"

So easy to say, "I must go!" so impossible to part, while Basil had still so much to say. They lingered in the summer-house, under the drooping ash; they lingered on the long walks above the Moat; they lingered at the gate. Basil would have gone up the hill with her.

"Absolutely not one step further!" exclaimed Alison. "No, no; you must not let mother see us together until—until we have made it all right with her, you know."

At last she tore herself away, and went

up the hill alone, Basil standing at the gate, watching her; she turning, every now and then, to look back. Then the last look came, and in another moment she was out of sight. But still he stood there, gazing at the spot where she had disappeared, as if rooted to the ground; and, as he gazed, the eager brightness of his eyes grew soft, and his lips half parted with a happy smile.

"My sweet, sweet Alison!"

One would have felt, could one have seen him thus, that his whole heart and soul were overwhelmed with love and joy and reverence, as the words welled up to the lips that failed to utter them.

Still looking at the spot where Alison had vanished, he was standing by the open gate of the Tower Gardens, with the deserted hill before him, when suddenly his dreamy gaze sharpened with horror. The empty space from which Alison had vanished was empty no longer. Another figure was there, and that figure was a woman's.

"Good God! good God!" he exclaimed. "It is she! She must have met Alison!"

But that figure was coming with hurried, uncertain steps, down the hill towards him. Terror-stricken, for once in his life, he fled into the garden, quickly turned the key, and hid himself behind the thick shrubs. The terror was all for Alison.

"Alison! Alison! Are you safe?" was, in the first agony of fear, all he could ask. Then his reason tried to seize his love by the throat, and compel attention. "Safe! of course, she's safe! How should that other know her? How connect her with me? What harm could have happened in two minutes? Don't be a fool; be reasonable! Reasonable? My Alison! My Alison!" He slunk away into the darkest corner of the nearest summer-house, keeping as near to the shrubs that bordered the walk above the Moat as possible, as he hurried along. Was it all over, the happy dream that, not five minutes ago, had been so real, so solid. Had it suddenly turned to

a hideous nightmare? "She has come to keep her oath! She swore I should never marry another woman!" Basil feared neither God nor man; but the inherited superstition of ages was too strong for him then. The avenger was on his track. He knew it. With despair it came over him, as he sat in the dark corner, that it was vain to fight against that avenger. "I shall never know a moment's peace as long as Alison and she are in the same country!" And then he cursed himself and the one he called "his enemy" long and bitterly.

Scarcely thought of at all for many months past, what a fearful personality that woman, who had just risen up before him, like the ghost of an evil deed, had suddenly become! He had named her at once, "My enemy." "Is she going down to the Tower?" Never! She has too much respect for herself! But, perhaps, now she may! I'm not going to skulk here in fear of her. If she comes once, she'll never come again!"

He sprang up in rage and desperation, hurried through the garden, as if impelled to strike down his enemy, once for all, passed through the door by Irongate Wharf, and so to his lodgings in the Salt Tower. "She'll never come here! Never! But, if she does——"

He ran up the narrow, winding stairs, so new and clean, and so exact an imitation of the ancient staircase that once was there, into a large, circular, vaulted room on an upper story; a vaulted room, somewhat like the one in which the Regalia is kept, only new and clean, with here and there an old inscription or device built into the reconstructed walls. A wizard was imprisoned in the old Salt Tower, in the days of Elizabeth; his cabalistic signs are still to be seen there. But the new Salt Tower, where Basil Penrose lived, had no signs of a dark prison lodging about it. The light streamed from the arched windows into an apartment as spruce and neat as a lower middle-class "best room"

on a Sunday morning. It had been furnished, not by Basil, but by the gallant warder, who, as a reward for his devotion to his country, held the Salt Tower; all was as trim as he and his excellent wife could make it. British ferns, of giant growth, sprawled on the carpet; a red and blue checked cloth covered the table; while, before the deep embrasures of the windows, there were green wire stands, on which bloomed a profusion of scarlet geraniums and yellow musk.

Pale with rage, Basil hurried to the stand, and in pushing it aside planted himself before the embrasure with his hands clenched tightly behind him, and looked out over the heaps of *débris* which still remained of the recently demolished Guard House, and the blocks of new stone soon to be built into the new Lantern Tower, down on to the roadway beyond. All was silent and deserted then. The chip of the mason's chisel would not sound again until Monday morning. The Govern-

ment Stores were closed; the Sabbath seemed to have come already out of doors; but in Basil Penrose's heart and brain there was a fierce tempest raging, such as even he had never lived through before. "If she comes!" Certainly, if she came, his impulse would be to kill her. As he stood there watching, he looked capable, not only of killing her, but of putting her to the most cruel death. His face was terrible to see. To get rid of her—no matter at what cost to her—to get rid of her so thoroughly, that never again would it be possible she should rise up between him and his Alison, that was what he felt to be the one imperative necessity of existence. He waited; she was long in coming. There were only the heaps of rubbish, the new stones, the roadway, a warder or two, a couple of soldiers. He waited on. She did not come.

A new terror struck Basil; she might have turned back after Alison! He trembled at the thought. In vain his

reason told him that that other one—his "enemy" he called her—could in no way connect Alison with him; he could not listen to reason then. He must go at once and know if Alison were safe at home.

He went out boldly, and over Tower Hill. His enemy was nowhere to be seen. He went to John Harbuckle's, and rang the bell desperately. It seemed to him that they were ages before they came to the door. Perhaps some horrible tragedy had occurred, they were all too occupied to notice the bell. He turned faint with dread. Then the door was gently opened, not by a servant, but by Alison herself, who, from an upper window, had seen him coming through the Square. He stepped within the hall, and, throwing his arms around her, pressed her to him with an intensity of emotion that terrified her. He tried to speak, but his voice failed him.

"Oh, Basil, Basil! Why are you so pale?" she cried. "Why have you come? What is the matter?"

"My darling! my darling! Only tell me again that you love me!" he cried.

"I do, indeed I do! I love you, Basil!" she panted.

"Then let me see your mother! Let me settle it all now, at once! I cannot wait!"

"No, no; she's not well! Do as we arranged. Write to your father, and let him manage it. You promised me you would. I must go,"—hurriedly,—"good-bye, good-bye; they are waiting for me. Oh, good-bye. Indeed, indeed, I must go! Write to your father."

"It is against my own judgment."

"I know, I know, dear! but do it, for my sake! Good-bye, good-bye!"

The reaction was almost more than Basil could bear. He went into the Tower Gardens, and sat down in the summer-house, opposite the Devereux Tower, where he and Alison had talked together not an hour ago. In the brief time that had passed since then, how desperately he had

realized what she was to him! If any one had told him, before he met Alison, that a time was coming when it would be possible for him to feel what he now felt, how scornfully he would have demonstrated the folly of entertaining such an impossible idea! The fear, the terror, of having her snatched away from him, in the very first hour after their betrothal, unmanned him in a way that was altogether a new experience to him. She was safe; he knew it, he had seen her; but he could not recover his self-command. For hours after, every nerve was tingling, and when he was calm enough to think, a sufficiently alarming future rose before his vision. "Why can't I go out and slay my enemy?" he asked himself. "A man should slay his enemy at once, and be free." But his first rage was nearly spent, and much as the restrictions of civilized life might gall him, he knew he could not disregard them without sacrificing his own future, as well as Alison's. "I must work day and night,

and marry Alison," he said, "I shall never know a day's peace in this place!"

Did something like remorse work in his heart, as he walked back to his lodgings in the Salt Tower? Perhaps so; at any rate, there were passages in his past life on which it seemed to him the light of Alison's influence fell, making them seem to him altogether different from the purely personal affairs, which no one had the slightest right either to praise or blame, he had hitherto deemed them. He went back to his lodgings in the Salt Tower, moody and sad, in spite of the happiness that would, through all his forebodings, spring up, whenever he recalled Alison's love for him. He sat down to write to his father with an uncomfortable sense of curtailed freedom, a hampering of his own activities and idiosyncrasies, and an indefinite dread of the days to come. As he wrote, however, his individuality asserted itself strongly. He wrote a long letter that ran something like this:—

"Salt Tower, Tower of London, E.C.

"My dear Father,

"It has not often occurred that my tastes and yours have run in the same direction; but I think you will be pleased with the future daughter-in-law I have been happy enough to secure for you. As you have seen her, I need not attempt the task of describing her. I could not do so adequately, and I hate a comparative failure. She is orthodox in every way, goes to church, and, as you must have observed, knows how to talk to a clergyman. She has only one drawback—her mother, who does me the honour of hating me. Personally, I like being hated by Mrs. Bayliss. Few things would give me more pleasure than a stand-up fight with her; but my dear girl being sadly hampered by ancient Semitic notions about parents, and filial duty, etc., holds me back. Alison, who has at present a will of her own, says she won't quarrel with her mother, she

won't give me up, she won't keep our engagement a secret, and she won't let me speak to Mrs. Bayliss. From such resolutions—the result of her defective education—complications, which will worry her, must necessarily ensue. It is in the nature of things that Mrs. Bayliss should not understand me. I could make her do so if I chose to compromise all my principles; but as I prefer to retain my own respect for myself, which is quite incompatible with Mrs. Bayliss's respect for me, I don't chose. At the same time, flattering as it may be to be considered a fiend by one who is not a member of my own family, it is an insufferable nuisance not to be able to see Alison whenever I wish to do so.

"Now, look here, Reverendissimo; no one understands the class of mind—if mind it can be called—to which Mrs. Bayliss belongs, better than yourself. I am told, on the best authority, that you impressed

her very favourably. What I want you to do is to come up to town as soon as you can. Bring my mother with you, and I will take her out and show her some shops and people she will like to see, while you are making things right in Trinity Square.

"My little invention promises well. There is a good deal of noise as of the boiling of water. I trust it may not be due to the mere crackling of thorns under the pot. As to money, I have not much fear on that score; I will go into the subject at length when we meet. Meanwhile, believe me, that having pleased you in this important, but entirely personal matter, does really add very materially to the happiness of

"Your affectionate son,

"BASIL

"P.S. She says she likes you.—I don't mean Mrs. Bayliss, although she does too;

but she is not She. Be sure to give my best love to my mother. If you both can manage to come up by first train on Tuesday, do. Wire me on starting, and I will be at Liverpool Street to meet you.

"B."

END OF VOL. II.

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